Film Quarterly

Volume 50
Number 4
Summer 1997

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Call toll-free 800-872-7423. Web site: http://www.cup.org
MasterCard/VISA accepted. Prices subject to change.

Volume 50
Number 4
Summer 1997

Film Quarterly

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Printed in USA

Type
Irene Imfeld Graphic Design
Berkeley, CA

Printing
Allen Press, Lawrence, KS

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Film Quarterly (ISSN 0015-1386) is published quarterly by the University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 94720. Periodicals postage paid at Berkeley, California, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian GST #R122058662. POSTMASTER: send address changes to Film Quarterly, University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94720.

Subscriptions are $24 per year for individuals, $53 per year for institutions. Subscribers outside the U.S., add $6 for postage. Single issues are $5.95 for individuals, $14 for institutions. Domestic claims for nonreceipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the month of publication, overseas claims within 180 days. Overseas delivery is not guaranteed.

Subscription requests and requests for advertising rate cards should be sent to the Journals Department, manuscript enquiries to the Editor, Film Quarterly, at the University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94720. Unsolicited manuscripts should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1994. ∞

Back issues subsequent to Volume 18 (1965-66) write to the University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94720. ♻ This journal is printed on recycled paper. The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors only.

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Dr. Warren Chapin (Vincent Price) experiments on his beautiful but unfaithful wife Isabelle (Patricia Cutts).

Mikita Brottman

Ritual, Tension, and Relief

The Terror of *The Tingler*

William Castle's *The Tingler*, released in 1959, features a suave Vincent Price as Dr. Warren Chapin, a research scientist deeply engaged in experimentation on the cause and often lethal effects of human fear. Chapin suspects that many people who have died from extreme fear were killed by a bizarre, lobsterlike parasite—the "tingler"—that takes shape within the vertebrae and can be prevented from materialising only by the victim's screams. However, if the victim is not able to release the tension caused by this fear by screaming, the tingler takes shape and cracks the human spine.

Chapin's lab assistant (and sister-in-law's fiancé) Dave Morris (Darryl Hickman) provides him with live dogs and cats to use in his experiments in the pathology of human fear, but Chapin is more interested in human subjects. His first victim is his spiteful and unfaithful wife Isabelle (Patricia Cutts), whom he frightens into unconsciousness at gunpoint. Studying X rays of her spine, he and Dave discover the bony shape of the tingler emerging from Isabelle's vertebrae. Later, Chapin attempts to experiment on himself by locking himself in his laboratory and injecting himself with 100 micromilligrams of liquid LSD, recording his hallucinations, and trying desperately not to scream. Skulls and skeletons come to life; he has trouble breathing; the walls close in on him; and his tingler emerges . . . but the doctor gives in to his tension and destroys it with a scream.

Eventually, Chapin finds the perfect subject for his experiment: a paranoid deaf-mute woman (Judith Evelyn) with a morbid terror of blood. With a little unexpected help from her avaricious husband Olly (Philip Coolidge), the deaf-mute is trapped in her apartment over a silent-movie theater and slowly frightened to death by a series of shocks: windows slam suddenly closed; a rocking chair rocks of its own accord; a hideously masked stranger pursues her with a hatchet; a beckoning hand emerges from the depths of a blood-filled bathtub (bright red technicolor in an otherwise black-and-white film); and the woman's death certificate appears pinned to the door of the bathroom closet—*Cause of Death: FRIGHT.*

Upon determining the reason for the woman's death—that she had indeed died of fear—Chapin is granted permission by the seemingly innocent Olly to perform an important experiment. In the laboratory in his home, the doctor manages to remove the tingler from the body's spine with a pair of forceps, and we are given our first glimpse of its spiny, powerful form—in silhouette only, however: Chapin is operating behind a strategically placed screen. Almost immediately the tingler attacks Chapin's arm, falling off only when he screams. The tingler (recaptured and picked up gingerly with a pair of for-

ceps) is then placed in a special locked box while Chapin and his wife toast his success. But Isabelle (who wants him dead so she can marry her lover) has drugged his wine, and he falls unconscious onto the couch while his vengeful wife goes to release the tingler, which then crawls onto the doctor's prone body, choking him around the neck with its spiny pincers until disempowered at the last moment by the screams of Isabelle's sister Lucy (Pamela Lincoln).

Finally convinced that he has "violated the laws of nature," Chapin takes the tingler over to Olly's house to place it back in the body of Olly's dead wife. However, during the process the tingler escapes, slips down under the floorboards, and makes its way into the silent-movie theater below. On the loose, it attacks a girl in the audience, causing widespread hysterics. Dr. Chapin's voice is heard from the darkened screen assuring the audience that the girl is being taken care of and that everything is under control. Moments later, a second tingler attack takes place, this time on the projectionist. The lights dim again, and the projected silhouette of the tingler crawls across the screen. Chapin addresses the audience once more, this time encouraging everyone to "scream for your lives!" until the tingler is thwarted, the danger has passed, and, claims Chapin, "We can now return to our picture."

The scientist replaces the lethal organism in the body of its host and leaves for the police station. Olly, left alone, finds himself sealed in the apartment with the corpse. But the dead woman, in a perfectly timed post-mortem muscular spasm, sits up and directs an icy stare at her husband. In the film's final ironic twist, Olly falls dead to the floor. *Cause of death: FRIGHT.*

A condemned prisoner is carried screaming to his death in the electric chair.

The Abominable Showman

Born in New York City in 1914, Castle broke into show business at the age of 15, getting a small part in a Broadway show by falsely representing himself as a nephew of Samuel Goldwyn. He went through a wide spectrum of acting, producing, and writing jobs before moving to Hollywood as an actor at the age of 23. After a transitional period as a dialogue director, he began directing on his own. His first picture was *The Chance of a Lifetime*, which, when it appeared in 1942, was hailed by *Variety* as "probably the worst directed picture in the history of motion pictures." But Harry Cohn, at Columbia, gave the 29-year-old Castle another chance to direct. *The Whistler*, a thriller, was a commercial success, and the respect Castle earned as the film's director enabled him to pursue a successful career. He directed dozens of low-budget films, showing some minor flair for crime and action situations.

It was not until the late 1950s, however, that Castle really came into his own by setting himself up as an independent producer, director, and—most importantly—showman. He specialized in chillers and schlock-horror films, most of which were panned by critics for "poor taste" but still fared handsomely at the box office. His most ambitious and best-known film was his 1968 adaptation of Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby*, which he produced but wisely left Roman Polanski to direct. Later in his career, Castle produced a number of television shows, portrayed a producer in Hal Ashby's *Shampoo* and a director in Schlesinger's *Day of the Locust* (both 1975); he finally died of a heart attack in 1977, on the set of a film he was producing for M-G-M.

But the Abominable or Showman, or the King of the Bs—as Castle came to be known at Columbia—is probably best remembered for the series of low-budget horror films he made between 1958 and 1962, for it was in these successful but exploitative

chillers that the director formed a personal bond with his audience through a wide series of feisty, carnival-style gimmicks and hokum gimcracks. Early experiments with wide-screen 3-D features and on-camera appearances (to introduce himself and to prepare the audience for the forthcoming cinematic experience) encouraged Castle to play around with various promotional ploys and exploitation devices that guaranteed his films their box-office success. "I've modelled my career on P.T. Barnum," he once boasted, and his influence on the subsequent history of exploitation cinema is undeniable. John Waters, himself the proud inventor of Odorama, has referred to Castle as King of the Gimmicks, confessing that "William Castle was my idol. His films made me want to make films. I'm even jealous of his work. In fact, I wish I *were* William Castle."[1]

The earliest of Castle's experiments came with the 1958 release of *Macabre*, for which he took out a notorious policy with Lloyds of London insuring every ticket buyer for $1000 in case they "died from fright" during the movie. Mock insurance policies appeared in all the newspaper ads. Giant replicas of the actual policy hung over the marquees. Hearses were parked outside the theaters, fake nurses in uniform were paid to stand around the lobbies, and Castle himself arrived in a hearse at some of the film's presentations and made his entrance emerging from a coffin. A great commercial success, *Macabre* was followed in the autumn of the same year by *The House on Haunted Hill*, featuring an intriguing new slant on the recently deceased 3-D process which Castle named Emergo. Selected theaters showcasing *The House on Haunted Hill* were wired from screen to balcony with a pair of cables and a pulley. At a climactic moment during the film, the screen momentarily blackened, cueing the projectionist to set in motion a 12-foot illuminated plastic skeleton which, in the words of the *New York Times* movie reviewer, "slid straight forward to the balcony, blankly eyed the first-row customers, and slid back." The luminous skeleton upstaged even Vincent Price, Castle's first real star, especially—as often seems to have happened—if it got stuck half way down its cables or managed to jump its wires completely and fall into the audience, causing hysterical frenzy.[2]

Castle's *13 Ghosts*, released by Columbia in 1960, offered its enthusiastic audience the experimental device of Illusion-O, where each spectator was presented with a "ghost viewer" (an obscure twist on 3-D glasses). The ghost viewer extended Castle's promotional fascination with audience participation —one half of the ghost viewer allowed the spectator to see the 13 ghosts, the other half didn't, leaving the film somewhat blurred and rather surreal. Waters remembers that, although audiences seemed "bewildered" by this rather imperfect technical breakthrough, "they still bought the gimmick."[3] *Thirteen Ghosts* was followed up by the transvestite-themed shocker *Homicidal* (1961). Blatantly influenced by Hitchcock's recently released *Psycho* (1960), during whose screening cinemas refused admission after the film had already begun, *Homicidal* featured a "fright break" two minutes before the end of the film, during which time the screen would go blank and Castle's voice, backed by the sound of a heartbeat, would announce that anyone too frightened to watch the end of the film could leave the theater and get a full refund. In a number of theaters, those taking advantage of this offer had to follow yellow footsteps up the aisle, bathed in a yellow spotlight, past yellow lines with the stencilled message "Cowards Keep Walking," past a nurse who would offer a blood pressure test, to a yellow cardboard booth in the lobby called Coward's Corner, where—to the accompaniment of a record blaring "Watch the chicken! Watch him shiver in Coward's Corner!"—

Chapin records his hallucinations on an LSD trip as part of his experiment in the pathology of human fear.

he or she would be forced to sign a yellow card stating, "I am a *bona fide* coward."

Homicidal was followed up in the same year with *Mr. Sardonicus*, a grotesque adaptation of Victor Hugo's story "The Man Who Laughed," featuring the Punishment Poll. On entering the theater, each spectator was issued with a DayGlow card containing a thumbs up/thumbs down design similar to a playing card. Before the last reel of the film, an usher conducted the Punishment Poll and the audience was allowed to determine the fate of *Mr. Sardonicus* by holding up their Mercy/No Mercy verdicts. Although Castle supplied every print of the film with two different endings, Waters claims that "not *once* did an audience grant mercy, so this one particular part of the film has *never* been seen."[4] And Castle had a slew of zany ideas that guaranteed his films promotional success. *Zotz!* (1962), aimed at a younger audience, was accompanied by the creation of millions of magic Zotz coins, distributed weeks in advance of the film's release; *13 Frightened Girls* (1963) was promoted with the gimmick of a worldwide talent hunt for the prettiest girl in each of 13 countries. *Straitjacket* (1963) included free gifts of small cardboard axes streaked with simulated blood; in Castle's final gimmick, the back three rows of the theater for all showings of *I Saw What You Did* (1965) were advertised as the "shock section" and fitted out with seatbelts on each chair to prevent the spectator being "jolted" out of their seat from fear.

The most bizarre and ambitious experiment in audience participation, however, was without a doubt Castle's device of Percepto. During all first release screenings of *The Tingler*, Castle instructed movie theater managers to wire up small electric motors, similar to handshake buzzers, to a certain number of seats. When the tingler breaks loose in the silent-movie theater and kills the projectionist, the real movie-theater screen goes blank and an anonymous voice (supposedly that of the theater manager) announces "Attention! The tingler is loose in this theater. Please scream for your life." At this point, a specially planted female stooge in the real audience would burst into hysterics and have to be carried out by a (fake) nurse in uniform. Moments later, during the third tingler attack in the movie, the (real) projectionist would push a button activating the electrical charges on the wired-up seats, allowing certain unfortunate movie spectators to be hit at the base of the spine by a brief electrical jolt. Then the silent movie-theater screen dims again, and the same anonymous voice encourages the real audience to "scream for your lives", echoed by the frenzied on-screen cinema audience screaming lines like "It's over here! Help! It's over here!" Ideally, the *real* audience was literally swept into the film's action by the buzzing of the Percepto activators, until Chapin assures the silent-movie audience (and the real one) that the tingler has been paralysed and the danger has passed.

Like Emergo, Percepto did not always function as the director might have anticipated. The most common anecdote, recounted by Castle in his autobiography *Step Right Up!*, involved a cinema whose management, having dutifully installed the Percepto equipment the night before *The Tingler* was supposed to be shown, decided to test the device on a group of older women who were watching *The Nun's Story* on the last night of its run, with predictably hysterical results.[5] Waters tells an anecdote about a showing in Philadelphia where one beefy truck driver was so incensed by the Percepto buzzer underneath his chair that he ripped his entire seat from the floor and had to be subdued by five ushers.[6] Other Castle fans remember their suspense being broken by a broadcast announcement that "The tingler is wanted in the lobby." John Waters describes his experience of *The Tingler* as being "the fondest movie-going memory of my youth":

> I went to see it every day. Since, by the time it came to my neighbourhood, only about ten random seats were wired, I would run through the theater searching for the magic buzzers. As I sat there experiencing the miracle of Percepto, I realised there could be such a thing as Art in the cinema.[7]

Traumatization and the Limits of Psychodrama

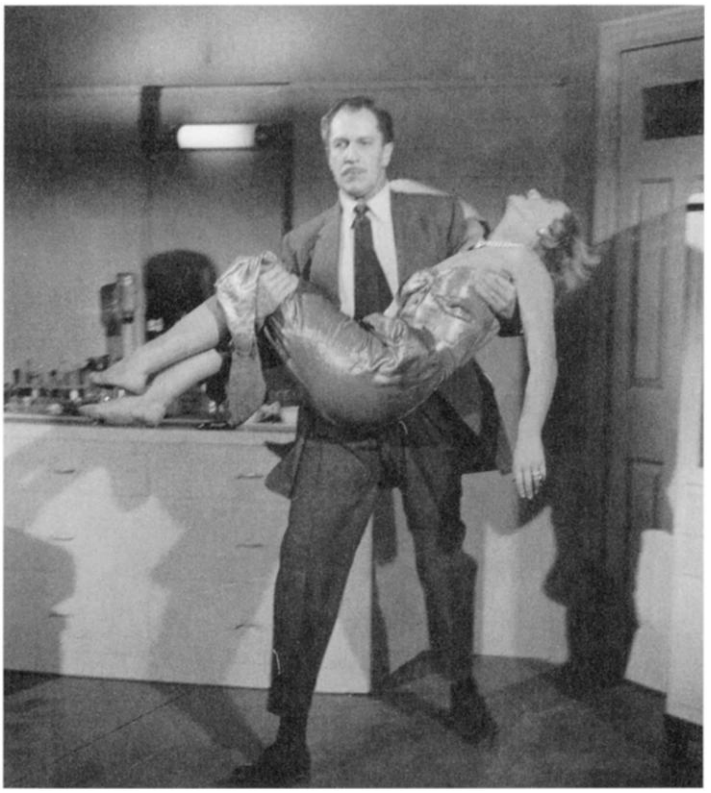
Although Castle's deployment of experimental audience-participation devices was obviously intended as no more than a bravura commercial ploy, *The Tingler* is in fact a deeply complex and interesting film, and in wiring up his cinema seats with electrical cables, Castle was in fact—albeit unknowingly—extending the principles of experimentation with theatre, audience, and spectacle initiated by Marinetti and the Italian Futurist movement in the late 1920s. A reading that

attends to these complexities, however, tends to meet a great deal of resistance from the many loyal and nostalgic fans of exploitation cinema, most of whom would argue that *The Tingler* is a piece of fun-house trickery whose sheer brazen effrontery is enjoyable in itself; that Castle's sole priority was to entertain; and that, as critic John Brunas comments in *Midnight Marquee*, "to search deeper into [Castle's] productions for obscure messages is critical pretentiousness of the first order."[8] Most fans of exploitation cinema appreciate and relish Castle's work as gleeful fairground bravado, relying on a surface facetiousness and tongue-in-cheek aplomb enlivened by moments of sudden, shrill shock.

These are certainly all characteristics of Castle's films, of which *The Tingler* is the most tricksy and hokum-laden example. But surely one of the most important aims of film criticism is to concretize and vivify the symbolic nature of these half-thoughts and semi-awarenesses that the plot of the film hints at, suggests, or makes manifest, however superficial, sporadic, or facetious they may be. Ironically, in an interview with *Cinefantastique* less than two years before his death, Castle remarked on his fascination with contemporary theoretical analysis of his 50s and 60s horror films, which, as Castle points out with some pleasure, "are being treated with increasing respect, and taken very seriously today at the universities where they study them."[9] He goes on to make some other observations:

> It's a very strange thing. I definitely feel that possibly in my unconscious I was trying to say something. . . . I never expected that they would put under a microscope pictures that I made in the fifties and sixties and look for hidden meanings. Nevertheless, that is what is happening. . . . And I think about inner meaning, truly, it is possible that deeply buried within my unconscious was the feeling of trying to say something. . . . And I get this from *The Tingler*.[10]

The tendency to take Castle's films seriously is clearly not widespread enough for John Waters, whose retrospective of Castle's work in *American Film* is in part an attack on critics for being slow to elevate "this ultimate eccentric director-producer" to cult status.[11] But in fact, Waters was behind the times. *Cahiers du Cinéma* had published a brief but serious article about Castle's work by way of obituary in 1977, remarking on some of the ways



As part of his experiment, Chapin renders his wife Isabelle unconscious from fear.

in which films like *The Tingler* stand as realizations of the spectacular "happening-cinema" conceived by the Futurist movement: a system of traumatization, "where the spectacle unfolds not only on the screen, but also in the room, with special effects that allowed the audience to be played with like puppets."[12] Comparing Castle's work to that of Italian horror auteur Dario Argento, *Cahiers du Cinéma* praised *The Tingler* for its radical use of color in an otherwide black-and-white film, describing the film as "unfolding at the limits of psychodrama" and "in the popular psychoanalytic style of Tennessee Williams." For Castle, *Cahiers* rightly concludes, "only the spectacle counted."[13]

It is also significant that a whole spectrum of established film critics have recalled a childhood experience of *The Tingler* as their archetypal horror movie-going experience, and it has long been a commonplace of horror film criticism—ever since the publication of Robin Wood's *An Introduction to the American Horror Film* in 1979—that such experiences can be far more profound than those available to spectators of more "serious" cinema.[14]

In *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, John Fraser catalogues some of the more marvellous elements of horror movies which help to realize this complexity of emotional experience. Firstly,

according to Fraser, there is the marvelousness of the supernatural, or of things and events so exotic as to border on the supernatural, such as the notion of a crustacean parasite existing along the human spine, a creature that is energized and given strength by the power of human fear, which brings it to life as a concrete, living thing. Secondly, there are the surrealistic creations of the imaginations of non-supernatural characters, such as Dr. Chapin's baroque laboratory, with its skulls and skeletons, its cats and dogs in cages, or Olly's shady home located above a silent-movie theater. Thirdly, normal-seeming people reveal horrendous qualities. The dedicated research scientist, not unlike the movie director himself, is revealed as an ingenious loon, willing to threaten his wife with a gun and frighten a deaf-mute woman to death in a deluded attempt to infringe the essential principles of nature, just as the mild and lowly Olly is unmasked as an avaricious wife killer. Everyday objects become charged with great menace, such as the teacup Chapin smashes and uses as a weapon with which to draw his own blood, questioning the extent of Olly's wife's obsessive-compulsive affliction.

Environments intended to be nurturing become very much the opposite in *The Tingler*, like Chapin's Regency mansion or the silent-movie theater where the tingler is accidentally let loose. In the same way, seemingly immutable social or vocational occasions are fearsomely desanctified, such as the suave and sophisticated Dr. Chapin's home visit to his patient Martha Higgins (Olly's wife), or Chapin and his wife's toast to celebrate the success of his latest scientific discovery ("Here's to the tingler!"). Most fundamental to the horror movie gestalt, however, is *The Tingler's* classic narrative projection of a progressive entry into a forbidden center. This center is Chapin's laboratory, with its skeletons, corpses, caged animals, and hallucinogenic potions—the nexus of Chapin's desparate quest for knowledge and the terrifying dangers of discovery. Dave's stolen dogs and cats are rejected by Chapin in favor of self-experimentation. "I want to personally sense the power of the tingler in a controlled fear situation," he claims, "but nothing scares me." And yet, as Warren later says to Dave, "to break the laws of nature is a dangerous thing, and we've not only broken its laws, we've violated its basic principles. We had to, and now we've got to stop." Or, in the words of that old horror movie motif, "There are some things man was not meant to know."

Animal Body Doubles

The Tingler lays bare a shared fascination with the physiology and the workings of the human body—both the on-screen bodies and the participating bodies of the cinema audience—and it is this fascination that allows the critic to access the film's conscious and unconscious implications. The terror of the tingler relates to our own understanding of the ancient commonality of the human body, its failings, ruptures, and weaknesses.

The pattern that starts to emerge from a close analysis of *The Tingler* is one that bodies forth the close relationship between the symbolic order and the bodily order, disclosing how each gives form to the other in a dynamic intermingling of meanings that constitutes the basis for the history of human cultures and the symbolic importance of their narratives. To chart analogues between the symbol structure of contemporary narratives and the belief systems of earlier societies is not, as it may seem at first, an attempt to cast a net further and wider for random connections, but rather an effort to look more deeply at the history of the human body, with its secret and disguised level of conscious understanding. A number of primitive cultures also tell stories like that of *The Tingler*, involving versions of the animal double motif. Some societies accept it as a matter of certainty that many people have secret animals like the tingler inside their bodies. These are either people with the power to temporarily assume the form of an animal, or animals that can assume a human form.

The traditional animal double, according to anthropology, inhabits ambiguous areas of the social structure domain, habitually presiding at funerals and ghost sacrifices. It has been suggested that the animal double presides over areas of social and cultural life which are by nature ambiguous, unpredictable, and dangerous. In the same way, Castle's tingler is associated with murders, autopsies, and funerals, as well as the nether worlds of neurosis, paranoia, and mistrust, and the ambiguous domains of death and sex. As the narrative unfolds, we come to learn that the tingler presides over a night-world of psychosis, adultery, theft, bribery, corruption, broken promises, broken marriages, and wife murder.

One final point on this theme: The *animal* double does not always take the form of an animal (in the zoological sense); it may equally take the form

of an insect, fish, or bird. The tingler is a kind of hybrid parasite—a cross between a worm, a lobster, and a centipede. Castle describes it in his autobiography as "sort of like a lobster, but flat, and instead of claws it has long, slimy feelers."[15] Whilst there are plenty of examples of animal doubles that take the form of shellfish or insects, it is worth examining the fact that these categories of creatures are in themselves ambiguous and liminal. Shellfish, reptiles, and insects are the equivocal residue of the animal world, not quite animals and not quite fish, considered by some cultures to be the animal enemies of human beings.[16] Some anthropologists have suggested that insects are considered abject and interstitial because they are not rated as food (in most countries at least), whereas reptiles and shellfish are determined to be freakish and ambiguous because their cold-bloodedness distances them from our far greater affective closeness to warm-blooded animals and birds. In this light, it is somewhat ironic that insects, reptiles, and shellfish are referenced metaphorically in many societies to describe the kind of witchcraft accusations that occur within a domestic situation, where people all live closely together, as in the Kwahu proverb, "Only the insect in your own cloth will bite you."[17]

Defecation and the Power of the Scream

Interestingly, a number of primitive and tribal cultures conceive of the animal double as faecal in both form and consistency. If the province of this creature is to negotiate those ambiguous areas of culture, society, and the body, it is wholly befitting that the animal double should emerge from the indistinct boundaries of the human body. In direct opposition to everything we consider human, the animal is a category inhabiting all those dark, shadowy cracks and crevices of human culture and the human body: not inside but outside, not the womb but the anus, not birth but defecation—and sometimes neither here nor there but *in between*, which inevitably connects it to the interstitial nature of the horror genre itself.[18] It is surely not stretching the imagination too much to acknowledge that there is obviously something rather faecal about the tingler. After all, it is a worm-like protruberance that gradually emerges from the anal inner space, and its arrival is heralded by a range of physical perceptions and sensations both pleasant and disturbing. The emergence of the tingler involves awkward writhings, expressions of pain and relief, and groans and wrenching sounds, followed by the gradual expulsion of a solid object from the space at the bottom of the spine.

Yet in this story, the ability to produce a human scream prevents the emergence of this faecal creature from the anal space. The faecal animal, "the force that makes your spine tingle when you're scared," has somehow transformed itself into a human voice. The metapsychology of the inner space of the human body image is so complex and multifaceted that it allows for plenty of cathexis, both concrete and symbolic, between different bodily openings, inner spaces, and the contents hidden behind these openings. In fact, the entire structural foundation for the inner body image is created by the cathexis of various sensations and actual functions of the body simultaneously with phase-specific images and figures of speech that are connected with the body.[19] So, for instance, the sound of the human voice can easily be imaginatively experienced as faeces, flatus, or urination—especially in cases of psychosis where the image of the body, especially its inner space, is disturbed. In relation to the top half of the inner body image, the lungs, larynx, and ears compose an inner space entity, the "excrement" or product of which is the human voice, words, and sounds—we react to important experiences by taking a deep breath, as though to internalise the auditory experience better, and our reaction to experiences we dislike or despise often involves expiration. Thus, in relation to the metapsychology of the human body image, it seems quite natural that a faecal image from the anus should be cathected into the inner space of the human voice.

According to Dr. Chapin, the tingler is a parasite that feeds off the stress and tension experienced in the spinal column at moments of intense fear. This tension can be released only by screaming, which, in turn, cuts off the tingler from its source of strength and renders it powerless. Scream, and you are safe. Fail to scream, and your body is lost to the tingler. When Dr. Chapin exhorts the on-screen audience to "scream for your lives!" to disempower the escaped tingler, he is also encouraging the screams of the by now hysterical *actual* cinema audience, whose panic-stricken reaction to random jolts of electrical energy should ideally, at least according to Castle's plan, serve as a promotional

Chapin prepares to extract his first living tingler.

device to excite and encourage the crowds waiting in the lobby for the next showing.

The escaped tingler embodies not only the link between oral and anal expulsiveness, but also the basic notion that there are anal feelings at the movies, and that these feelings are specifically activated by this film. Put in its most simple terms, the human fear of losing control of one's defecatory functions—embodied by the sight of an enormous, swollen faecal animal, alive and on the loose—is cathected into the socially legitimate chaos of mass ritual screaming (itself inspired by the screams of the on-screen cinema audience). As I suggested earlier, uncontrolled defecation and an ungovernable vocal spasm are essentially different manifestations of the same bodily impulse, the significant difference being that chaotic defecation is considered horrific and polluting, wheras ungovernable screaming—especially when participating in the public viewing of a horror movie—fits into a legitimate social category and has a communally accepted social function. To view *The Tingler* as it was originally screened is therefore to take part in a socially endorsed ritual of mass cathexis, where the threat of contamination is faced head on, displaced, and, at least temporarily, "overcome." And for those audience members fortunate enough to select seats rigged up with Percepto buzzers directing an electrical jolt at the base of the spine, just at the top of the buttocks, the experience can only have been doubly exciting and doubly hysterical. Perhaps the dynamics of this socialisation procedure make it easy to understand why watching *The Tingler* is recalled by so many film writers and critics as the most intense and exhilarating movie-going experience of their youth.

Film and Faeces

The Tingler is a tale of warning. It is a story of assault by a faecal animal double which comes to life inside the body at the peak of terror, extending "from the coccyx to the sternum," and which, when released outside the body, takes on a life of its own and crawls around frantically, causing a violent anal jolt when it attacks. This faecal creation is the product of massive unreleased tension, and can be calmed only by the cathexis of this defecatory neurosis into the vocal release of the scream. On one level then, this is a film about what Philip Rieff has described as "the triumph of the therapeutic," a trait of which is the widely held belief—almost a commonplace by 1959—that emotions we fail to get "out" somehow remain repressed "within" us until they find their own way "out," possibly of their own accord, and possibly in a rather frightening and dangerous way. The popular secularisation of Freudian psychoanalysis allows for the expression of certain kinds of so-called repressed desires and urges to become increasingly acceptable in the name of a process of psychic cleansing. As it has become increasingly common over the last 30 years to attribute such

repressed complexes to triggering childhood events (usually sexually or emotionally abusive parenting), the disclosure and display of such drives has met with increasing approval.

But *The Tingler* is a more involved film than a reading based on this very simplified therapeutic model might suggest. This is not a film about the expression of repressed fears in a tension-breaking psychic catharsis. Because it cannot be "attributed" to a single triggering event, because it will never become socially acceptable and because its effect is universal, the defecatory obsession is not really a neurosis we can "get in touch" with or "come to terms" with, as many other unconscious urges have come to be characterized. Horror at the perverseness of our bodily emissions is not just a repressed impulse waiting to return, but part of the neurological disease of being human. *The Tingler* is a bodily nightmare in which a faecal animal, swollen to frightening proportions, is given a life of its own and let loose upon the unsuspecting world of consciousness. The plight of an unfortunate neurotic deaf-mute whose unreleased tensions grow so great that they overcome her is simply the signal impelling the process of cathexis in the cinema audience from anal neurosis to oral expulsion and back again. Contrary to therapeutic fashion, however, this cathexis neither alleviates nor endures. The relief expressed in the scream of the spectator is nothing more than a socially admissible ritual of momentary release. In Castle's fantasy, the scream destroys the neurosis. But in the waking reality of our bodily lives, this crapulous preoccupation, like all the best monsters, like the faecal process itself, is totally indestructable.

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Notes

1. John Waters, "Whatever Happened to Showmanship?," in *American Film* 9 (1983), pp. 55-58.
2. See Waters, p. 56, and Bill Burgess, "William Castle," *Classic Images* 111 (September 1984), pp. 42-44.
3. Waters, p. 57.
4. Ibid., p. 58.
5. William Castle, *Step Right Up! I'm Gonna Scare the Pants off America* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1976).
6. Waters, p. 57.
7. Ibid.
8. John Brunas, "William Castle: Five Portraits in Black (1958-61)," in *Midnight Marquee* 29 (September 1979), pp. 4-12.
9. Burgess, p. 42
10. Ibid.
11. "Isn't it time for a retrospective? A documentary on his life? Some highfalutin critique in *Cahiers du Cinéma*? . . . Forget Ed Wood. Forget George Romero. William Castle was best. William Castle was God." (Waters, p. 57)
12. "Even the spectator who remains glued to his seat is nevertheless involved. The effects stopped at nothing." (Alain Garel, "William Castle: Obituary," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 21[1977], pp. 70-71.)
13. Ibid.
14. See Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in Andrew Britton et al., eds., *American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film* (Toronto, Festival of Festivals, 1979. Reprinted in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods* Vol. 2 [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989]).
15. In fact, the idea of the tingler was fashioned not by Castle but by his screenwriter, Robb White, who very quickly came to be embarrassed by it. "I hated them," says White of the series of films he made with Castle. "I mean, they're so dumb! God, there's not a worm in your backbone when you get scared!" (cit. in Bryan Senn and John Johnson, *Fantastic Cinema Guide* [London: McFarland, 1992]).
16. See, for exam→ John Halverson, "Animal Categories and Terms of Abuse," in *Man*, vol. 1, no. 4 (December 1976).
17. S→ Wolf Bleek, "Witchcraft, Gossip and Death: A Social Drama," in *Man*, vol. 11, no. 4 (December 1976).
18. Noel Carroll, in his book *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), describes the horror genre as interstitial in nature. Its monsters are frequently neither man nor beast, neither living nor dead, or else a result of such other-worldly processes as magnification (*King Kong, Night of the Lepus*) or reduction (*The Fly, The Incredible Shrinking Man*). Others belong to the category of the psychologically or morally interstitial (such as the psychopath, serial killer, or child murderer), sharing the category of those frightening bodily products (blood, excrement, tissue fluid) which, when appearing outside the bodily confines, are by necessity interstitial, and thereby out of place, corrupt, and taboo.
19. See Tor-Björn Hägglund and Heikki Piha, "The Inner Space of the Body Image," in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 49 (1980), pp. 256-83.

[This is a revised version of a piece published in the United Kingdom in *Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and Its Audiences*, ed. Deborah Cartmell et al. (Pluto Press, 1997).]

Giorgio Bertellini

A Battle *d'Arrière-Garde*

Notes on Decadence in Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice*

> Visconti seems more at home with musical analogies. On the few occasions when he does give Bogarde a clue as to what he wants, he will say, "Give me the Mahler who wrote the Ninth." How does Bogarde accomplish that? "I try to give him some sort of look," he said, with a shrug. "I told my manager the other day, 'I think I did a great look today.' Finally, after five weeks of musical acting, I said to [Visconti], 'This is an opera.' He gave me that stare of his, and said, 'You mean to say you didn't know?' "[1]

A portrait of decadence? Dirk Bogarde in *Death in Venice*.

In December 1971, the critics of the Cultural University Centre of Genoa published a *Guida dello Spettatore* (Guide for the Spectator) in which they proposed a curious hierarchy of the films shown in the city during that year. In the top positions were: *The Moonshine War*, by Richard Quine; *Shootout*, by Henry Hathaway; and *Just Before Nightfall*, by Claude Chabrol. In the last were *Le Vent d'Est*, by Jean-Luc Godard; *The Working Class Goes to Heaven*, by Elio Petri; and *Death in Venice*, by Luchino Visconti.[2] Just a few years after the ideological and cultural turmoil caused by the 1968 student revolt, the indifference of the Italian audience—or of cinephiles, at least—to political movies reached its peak. Interestingly enough, Visconti's adaptation of Thomas Mann's short novel is probably one of the least politically engaged movies of the director's career. That is not to say that the film does not cover any ideological territory, nor that it fails to address important developments in Italian cultural life, but it certainly seems to lack the urgency and the contingency of a political position. And yet, it was rejected and singled out as another dreary political tome.

Today this episode has a kind of ironical and bitter taste. Visconti made a very personal film about old-time literary and cultural obsessions; he even defined the project as a "work of maturity."[3] Yet his attempt was twice misunderstood and condemned: by the majority of critics, who hastened to announce a shifting in his career (for the worse) toward decadent topics typical of his class, and by film buffs who, in "the name of the Author,"[4] quickly decided what the film was about and thus rejected it as narcissistic, *passé*, and moreover, not entertaining. *Death in Venice*, in fact, emerges quite strangely from 1970s Italian cinema and culture: somehow the film seemed to collapse against them. Not only did the film's topic and theme appear anachronistic, but its artistic strategy and accomplishments were not particularly appreciated. Yet with this film Visconti produced one of his most personal achievements in terms of both subject inspiration and, most of all, cinematic invention. And he did it regardless of the prevailing critical atmosphere.[5] My reading of *Death in Venice* is thus an investigation of its cinematic strategies in the light of Visconti's constant interests in cultural and historical moments of crisis and in the light of a post-Romantic modern knot: the relationship between artist and his work.

Labelling *Death in Venice* a decadent work seems a gesture that has somehow acquired the tautology and automatisms of an old academic jingle. However, retracing the limits and the roots of such critical utterances may produce interesting effects of perspective when those assessments are compared to the stages of the Italian film industry, of the Italian cultural situation, and of Visconti's personal trajectory. In addition, with this film we are asked to face from the beginning a double object of contemplation. In 1971, Visconti adapted a major European literary work written by Thoman Mann on the eve of the First World War within a cultural milieu of theorized artistic decadence that did not have specific correlations in the radical political mutations of Italian life from the end of the 1960s to the early 1970s. Even after pairing the "artist" with the "intellectual" in terms of his/her responsibilities toward collective consciousness, what did a project like *Death in Venice* effectively represent for Italian cinema and culture?

Decadence: Between Artistic Degeneration and Poetic Necessity

The artistic movement named Decadence[6] best embodied the unquiet post-Romantic spirituality of modern Europe (regardless of specific national characteristcs).[7] The growing consciousness that nature and history (in the form of industrial and technological progress) were autonomous tendencies and forces totally indifferent to human agency led the decadent artist to adopt self-indulgent and inward-looking attitudes in search of deeper emotions, refined sensations, and opportunities for spiritual abandonment. In this exploration and glorification of artists' intimate dimensions, two aspects seem fundamental: the position of the artist toward society and the materiality of the art work.

The decadent artist is not concerned with a mimetic representation of the external reality (social, political, or historical), but with his[8] own unexplored and spiritual inner life (Verlaine, Rimbaud). He is the proud hero who ventures into his own intimacy; his art consists of morbid representations of the richness and ambiguity of his hallucinated and mysterious visions (Baudelaire) of sensuous mergings with the infinite (Leopardi). If the artist is a visionary of his own soul, his artistic engagement is therefore limited; art redeems,

frees, and refines, in fact, only the artist's own existence. No social commitment may be expected; artistic morality is a stimulating aestheticism as well as an ethical disregard. Despite his bourgeois roots, the artist haughtily represents a breed *super partes*, a refined aristocrat with constant passions for satanic and vicious atmospheres of luxurious and voluptuous decay (Poe, Swinburne, Rossetti).

In order to more effectively and intensely reproduce the sensual correspondences of his own precious viscera, the decadent artist finds in poetry (Novalis, French Symbolism, etc.) and in music (Wagner, above all) the ardent means of expression for the aesthetic paroxysms of decadent poetics. The melodic wave of words and notes resembled "quelque chose d'enlevé et d'enlevant, quelque chose d'excessif et de superlatif" (Baudelaire), and thus could better perform and play out the inner experiences of corruption, malady, and dissolution of the sensitive artistic soul.[9] What matters here is exactly this idea of performance that the art work stages not simply as a means of personal expression, but as a narcotic "artistic operation" of revelation, mutation, and regeneration.

Also at work in such an artistic atmosphere is what Barbara Spackman has defined as "the *rhétorique obsédante* of the nineteenth century: the rhetoric of sickness and health, decay and degeneration, pathology and normalcy."[10] Decadent artists placed and valorized their difference from bourgeois aesthetic values on the side of their physical pathology and illness, which enabled them to adopt and open new (hysterical) modes of poetic knowledge together with dream-like intertextual surfacings.[11] Through a new attention to the vehement materiality of the art work, decadents aspired to change bourgeois art into a supremely disruptive form of life. Artistic mastery also inspired the transfiguration of life itself, and the merging of the artist's biographical contingencies into the transcendental sphere of his own work.

Luchino Visconti (left) and Bogarde on the set of *Death in Venice*

It is not surprising that several post-Romantic poetic issues were later reinscribed by the historical avant-gardes: the discovery of the subconscious as the territory of the artist's source of expression was soon to be developed by the Surrealists and Expressionists, and the modern idea of coalescing content, form, and artist was contemporaneously appropriated by Futurists:

> Analogy is nothing more than the deep love that links distant, seemingly diverse and hostile things. An orchestral style, at once polychromatic, polyphonic, and polymorphous, can embrace the life of matter only by means of the most extensive analogies. . . . As we discover new analogies between distant and apparently contrary things, we will endow them with an ever more intimate value. Instead of *humanizing* animals, vegetables, and minerals (an outmoded system) we will be able to *animalize, vegetize, mineralize, electrify, or liquefy our style,* making it live the life of matter. For example, to represent the life of a blade of grass, I say, "Tomorrow I'll be greener."[12]

At this point, the nature and kind of decadence that Visconti's *Death in Venice* displays may be best illuminated when set against not only the atmosphere of artistic decadence described above, but also—and in particular—Thomas Mann's version of it.

Thomas Mann and the Desperate Heroism of Bourgeois Probity

Written before the cultural trauma of the First World War, Mann's work represents an act of ideological resistance. If Proust (who started his *Recherche* in 1907) attempts to recuperate the value of the artist's vast interiority through a neat refusal

of the outside (historical) world, Mann poses the problem—and sticks with it—of the decline of a certain bourgeois culture and of the problematic status of the artist in a bourgeois society, caught between the necessity of a truthful historical representation and the Romantic heritage of the artist's singularity.

Like decadent artists, Mann stages the post-Romantic consciousness of artistry in the narrative forms of a malady. From *Buddenbrooks* (1901) to *Tonio Kröger* (1903), from *The Magic Mountain* (started in 1912 and completed in 1924) to *Doctor Faust* (1947), the locus of an obscure pathology represents the emerging of the artist's destiny. In Mann one also finds the other ideologeme of decadent texts: the scene of convalescence. In this sense, the aesthete Des Esseintes in *A rebours* or the poet Andrea Sperelli in *Il piacere* seem significant precursors of the Gustav von Aschenbach of *Death in Venice*. Convalescence is both the co-presence of a disease, a paralysis, and its gradual disappearance; in it are mixed agony and rebirth, contamination and purification. The scene of recovery represents the site of a passage, an epiphany that may lead to fresher and utopian levels of modern consciousness. However, in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, the scene of convalescence does not offer any physical or artistic advancement; what is being accomplished produces instead a tragic and fatal recapitulation of the artist's failure. A new malady enters the scene, and no room is left for further possible convalescences.

Unlike the avant-garde authors who will perceive and ride the cultural crisis of those years, Thomas Mann seems to remain settled around the question of art in a sweeping bourgeois society. Gustav von Aschenbach, as has been noted,[13] is engaged in research *within* the slow agony of bourgeois probity, so that *Death in Venice* may be defined as a tragedy: the gradual and poignant disruption of an ideal of dignified art and existence. Aschenbach is overwhelmed by the tension of his perfect models and the virulent eruption of his own destiny. If, until the Venetian crisis, he had been posing (and theorizing) himself as the hero of discipline and dignity of his own times, the encounter with Tadzio's "wonderful" body causes a fatal crisis in Aschenbach's frigid and neoplatonic conceptualization of beauty, "a discriminating purity, simplicity, and evenness of attack which henceforth gave his productions such an obvious, even such a deliberate stamp of mastery and classicism."[14]

After that, Aschenbach's mutation appears radical. The former convalescence disappears as the new attraction shows itself as the real malady. Aschenbach realizes that the exemplary character of the artist, together with his moral ascetism and detachment from contingencies, is a soft but terrible illusion. Once he has lifted Maya's veil—as Thomas Buddenbrook had realized through his reading of Schopenhauer—the artist's pursuit of beauty becomes the supreme form of real knowledge in which the artist puts himself into risky play with all his own sensitivity.[15] The artist's singularity no longer makes him a social hero, a moral exemplar, or a collective consciousness. Aschenbach understands that the artist is the creature most vulnerable to beauty, subject to it as if to a pestilential contamination, and that he cannot any longer lead his life like a "closed fist." The creative effort resembles, instead, a lovemaking performance with its impetuous emotions and its exhausting spasms.

> He had never been so aware that Eros is in the word as during those perilously precious hours when, at his crude table under the canopy, facing the idol and listening to the music of his voice, he followed Tadzio's beauty in the forming of his little tract, a page and a half of choice prose which was soon to kindle the acclaim of many through its clarity, its poise, and its vibrant emotional tension. Certainly it is better for people to know the beautiful product only as finished, and not in its conception, its conditions of origin. For knowledge of the sources from which the artist derives his inspiration would often confuse and alienate, and in this way detract from the effects of his mastery. Strange hours! Strangely enervating efforts! Rare creative intercourse between the spirit and body! When Aschenbach put away his work and started back from the beach, he felt exhausted, or even deranged: and it seemed that his conscience was rebuking him, as if after a debauch.[16]

The artist's difference, as the most extreme form of bourgeois individualism, makes him a sensitive, overexposed, and lonely figure—no more the elected minstrel of a social class's distinguished hauteur and disciplined integrity. Aschenbach's physical death appears then as the conclusive episode of a gradual confrontation with Beauty and his own existential decay.

At this point a question emerges: What exactly did Visconti see in this radicalization of post-Romantic aesthetics and artistry? In the midst of the Italian Marxist milieu, where the artist/intellectual is supposed to fight for an utopian society and act as a Lukácsian seismograph of social phenomena,[17] what was the poetic space for an adaptation of Mann's *Death in Venice*? And, what was the sense and the long-awaited urgency of a drama about the artist's encounter with perfect beauty, personal authenticity, and death?

Visconti, the Tragedy of Social Change

Judgments of *Death in Venice* and Visconti's career result in puzzling as well as phantasmatic entities—like the "first" Visconti versus the "second," and such discussions end up debating where a phase should start or stop. It would be best to apply Occam's razor and see what level of explicability one may attain without doubling or tripling the careers of the Italian director but rather by assuming a set of poetic knots that recur extensively and with different emphases throughout Visconti's movies and that establish him as an auteur. And there are, at least, two orders of reason to do that.

First of all, for personality, aesthetic education, social grouping, and sexual orientation, Luchino Visconti was a solitary figure. Speaking of his poetics as "neorealist," "historiographical," or even "Communist" creates several problems, because it inevitably locates him within vague and collective categorizations. In particular, as Millicent Marcus has noted, the formal (and ideological) ambiguities of Italian neorealism seem to reproduce the speculative duplicities of canonical works like Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, where realism refers to a form of both *existential* and *historicist* representation.[18] Along these lines, it is easy to see that Visconti's neorealistic production started in a quite peculiar and ambiguous way.

The oldest (and the most affluent) of a group of intellectuals gathered around the film periodical *Cinema*, Visconti directed his first feature film, *Ossessione*, in 1942. From the outset, the film was heavily colored by anti-Fascist propaganda. Released as a kind of political and aesthetic manifesto, *Ossessione* displayed in the credits (but not in the actual making) a sort of collective author. The script, in fact, was officially signed by the group of *Cinema*'s film critics known as being quite *engagé* (like Mario Alicata, Giuseppe De Santis, Antonio Pietrangeli, Gianni Puccini, and novelist Alberto Moravia, together with the 36-year-old director). In reality, *Ossessione* showed a very original form of neorealism. As a result, we certainly cannot equate it with Rossellini's moralistic tales or De Sica-Zavattini's realist poetics, both of which are considered neorealist accomplishments. Here, however, one does not need to defend an auteuristic reading of Visconti, but certainly his artistic figure and the films themselves—from the very beginning—seem to demand such a critical orientation.

Visconti was not simply a film director—not only because he was able to direct operas and theatrical plays as well as films, but also because when he made movies, he employed representational performative strategies (mise-en-scène and musical score) which were uncommon in film spectacles. In addition, the Italian director's artistic beginnings reveal a distinct cultural personality. *Ossessione* is a deeply visual and narrative rupture from the rehearsed styles of the Italian national tradition, open to and in dialogue with international aesthetics and poetics. Visconti's directing in the theater, in 1945 and 1946, introduced onto the italian stage the works of Cocteau, Hemingway, Anouilh, Sartre, Dostoevsky, and Tennessee Williams. When, in the early 1940s, Visconti started writing about and making movies, he operated within a group of film critics and would-be directors who were eager to poetically recuperate the present after the artistic decline of a national film industry that had lost contact with its audience and with any mimetic ambition. Although *Ossessione*'s script was written with Giuseppe De Santis and Mario Alicata, for narrative pace and visual registers (framing, camera movement, and gesture) *Ossessione* already displayed Visconti's original film poetics. It seems to me possible, in fact, to speak of the Italian director's cinema as an uninterrupted endeavor to represent the "anthropological" (as he himself termed it) toll of historical dynamics.[19] The melodramatic tempo of Visconti's films emphasizes precisely these confrontations between a lucid consciousness of a social or historical change, and the human price that change exacts. To put it more briefly, Visconti's films consistently deal with the melodramatic discrepancies between reason and desire.

Read within this framework, several of his films stage similar patterns. *Ossessione* deals with the disaster of a family unit and with the crisis of the erotic desire of the two main characters (mainly for each other, but also for others) during the war years. *La terra trema* regards the tragic dissolution of another family unit due to a compelling desire for social change. Similarly, *Rocco and His Brothers* and *Sandra-Vaghe Stelle dell'Orsa* display the fraternal erotic and affective demands of a modern bourgeois society. *Senso* and *The Leopard* show the social price paid by a declining aristocracy in the face of problematic—and effectively demystified—nationalistic political transformations. It is with these films in mind that *Death in Venice* needs to be read and discussed, together with the visual and musical strategies that Visconti brought to an unprecedented poetic level.

Visconti's Decadence: "Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man"

In July 1972, soon after finishing the shooting of Ludwig, Visconti suffered a stroke. The decadent sickness seemed to have reached him after all.[20] One year before that, however, he had been shooting another story of sickness and convalescence, inspired by Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice.* Without contradicting my previous position regarding the critical necessity (and economy) of *one* Visconti, I believe that *Death in Venice* radicalizes a few constant features Visconti had displayed throughout his career. That is why this film, to a great extent, emerges as a symptomatic work.

Unlike previous accomplishments—*La terra trema* or *Rocco and His Brothers*—where the director assumed the role of the lucid and provocative (neo)realist conscience of his era, Visconti's adaptation of Mann's short novel seems more a personal, almost narcissistic exploration of the artist's relation to his work and life. In a world apparently far removed from political immediacies or historical contingencies, Visconti unfolds the drama of an early-20th-century musician whose confrontation with Beauty (ideal and corporeal), and thus with Death, appears quite close to his own existential and artistic dilemmas. In fact, Visconti had rather consistently maintained an aesthetic dedication to Beauty and splendor even when he was dealing with the daily struggles of the working class or lumpenproletariat or displaying a scrupulous and unconventionally philological attention to period mise-en-scène details (*La terra trema*, *Senso*, *The Leopard*).[21]

And yet Thomas Mann's plot remains a work of maturity. If in *The Leopard* it was too easy and obvious to read an identification between Prince Salina and the director, here an identification with the aphasic Gustav von Aschenbach appears perhaps more profound. Following the narrative thread of the German writer, and perhaps without any shadow of irony, Visconti attempted to explore the dramatic human shipwreck of an artist in the confrontation with Beauty and Death. And he accomplished that exploration by creating a strange cinematic object which is startling for the temperate cohesiveness of its expressive components in its depiction of a slow human disintegration.

The film stages a composed phenomenology of the artist's most authentic and challenging confrontation, the one with Death. It seems appropriate to speak of phenomenology because *Death in Venice* stages all the drama on the surface of its artistic textuality, visual and, especially, aural. Even with the narratively necessary flashbacks, the film is simultaneously aphasic and lyrical: short of words, but rich in musical registers. Music provides, in fact, a horizon of convergent cultural references (Mahler, and the post-Romantic antinomies art/life, artist/community); a narrative function

Bogarde (far right) comes face to face with his future.

(through the repetition of the adagietto of the Fifth Symphony as leit motif during the crucial moments of the plot); and the symphonic structure of the film (where movements and tempi seem to replace scenes and sequences, and determine the rhythm and signification of the visual unfolding).[22]

In an interview, music director Franco Mannino described the unprecedented use of music in *Death in Venice*:

> The proof that Visconti did not consider Mahler's music a mere accompaniment is that I directed it without even seeing the film. Visconti wanted me to work in my direction free from inhibitions or interference, and then he adapted the "visual regime" to the musical rhythms. This is a rare example, in cinema, of an artist's respect for an artwork.[23]

As a result, it should become clearer why certain scenes, not visually related by unities of space or time, are tied together by the melancholy melodies of Mahler's score. Likewise, the narrative introduction of Alfred's cynical and provocative discussions acts like a counterpoint to Aschenbach's exhausting and wordless decay; and the frequent presence of foreign (and unsubtitled) conversations (Polish, French, Russian, but also Italian) supports the idea of a continuous and undistinguishable musical flow that demands to be heard and followed like the equally indistinct sung lines of an opera.

The music is not alone in projecting the complex psychological struggles of the main character onto the mere surface—the phenomenon—of the film images. Another insistent cinematic strategy, the recurrent zooming, contributes to smooth the ideological discourse of the subject, and to lower the tension from a character's overt psychologisms to the rarefied superficies of the meticulously assembled mise-en-scène.

Through the (ab)use of the zoom lens, Visconti in fact dissolves the eloquent contrast of figure-in-the-foreground versus background that was so typical of his previous grand historical or sociological narrations (*The Leopard* and *Rocco*). There, this separative relationship enabled him to display and maintain a visual difference and focal distance between entities situated in distinct and different positions. From an ideological perspective, such a visual strategy of clearly identifying foreground and background is able to accurately collocate actions and agencies occurring on the horizons of History, that is, to *historicize* them. But the flattened planes of a telephoto shot create the opposite effect: namely, they disembody spatial consistency and subtract historical perspective, and they end up merging characters and atmosphere into an abstract optical cohesiveness. The newly obtained and often critically rejected unity of story and landscape,[24] together with the shaping and plastic role of the music score, gives birth to a very unconventional cinematic work.

Death in Venice then appears as a speechless eulogy, where the enunciative agency of the director goes underground while surfacing visual and musical tempos which should, in theory, exhibit the physical and psychological agony of Aschenbach *dying in Venice*.

This is not a judgement about whether the film works or not. I am less interested in providing a detailed assessment of the film's accomplishments, or of the tactics of its (inter)linguistic adaptation, than in investigating this work as a whole, because *Death in Venice* presents itself as a single poetic gesture, an aesthetic statement, or better, an authorial dramatic inquiry. This time the author's critical glance is not directed at the collapse of a social class because of historical changes, or at a family breakdown because of social and economic developments, but at a "classic" artist in front of the desperate goal of his own work, Beauty. This is why *Death in Venice* reveals a personal and almost autistic mood: as a melancholic contemplation of an artistic agony, the film seems to signal to its elected spectator, Visconti himself, with a request for reciprocity that cannot but recall the final gestural exchange between Tadzio—usually observed, now observer—bathing in the sea and Aschenbach—usually observer, now observed—dying on the shore. The visual rendering of a despairing authorial narcissism could not be more explicit.

At 65, an age euphemistically defined as pure maturity, Luchino Visconti, the director of grand historical and social decadences, made a film about his own decadence. Apparently removed from the major political changes Italy was undergoing (New Left movements, frequent and violent street protests, and radical intellectual turmoil), Visconti adapted a major decadent literary work about an old artist seeking Beauty and finding his own death. Growing old perhaps, created the urge for reflection on artistry in general, but Visconti

was also interested in a specific discourse about his own artistic career in the face of the confusion and disorder of the changing times. Some recent hostile criticism notwithstanding,[25] Visconti may have seen and contemplated his poetic delays and apathy toward the present with the same lucid fatalism and painful melancholy that Prince Salina showed in *The Leopard* when he decided to stop staring at his nephew's "marvelous" girfriend, Angelica. Accordingly, the recognition that it is too late to open new fronts of poetic engagement and that it would be dishonorable and obscene not to admit it, seems to constitute the personal battle the aging Visconti fights in Death in Venice. As the "inspired" Alfred whispers in the end: "And you are old, Gustav. And in all the world there is no impurity so impure as old age."

For some critics, the Italian director who first deserved the label of neorealist director and who best portrayed dramatic scenarios of social and historical change throughout the 40s, 50s, and 60s betrayed his duty as a Gramscian organic artist/intellectual with the decadent *Death in Venice*. He made a strange film where the music comes first and dominates the visual score, where the main character hardly speaks, and where the abuse of the zoom lens flattens the precious mise-en-scène of the famous Hotel des Bains onto the duelling glances of an old man and an androgynous Polish adolescent. And as Brunetta added, the film emphasizes Visconti's outspoken incapacity to keep up to date with film subjects and themes.[26] But Visconti was not shooting a diatribe against the corrupt decadence of bourgeois society at a holiday resort, as the angry 24-year-old Jean Vigo did in 1929 with his "visionary documentary" *A propos de Nice*. Rather, Visconti was producing a decadent portrait of his own biographical and cultural past, and pasting onto it the cinematic persona of an old musician corrupted by age. His original effort had more the tone of a "poetic justice" than that of a conceded artistic failure.

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Notes

I would like to thank William Simon for the invaluable remarks he made during a graduate course on Visconti, together with Valerie Walsh and the *Film Quarterly* editorial board for their careful and critical readings of the manuscript. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

1. Hollis Alpert, "Visconti in Venice," in *Saturday Review*, August 8, 1970, p. 18.
2. This episode is told by Italian historian Gian Piero Brunetta in *Storia del Cinema Italiano* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1979; rev. and ed., 1993; Vol. IV), pp. 62-63.
3. "[*Death in Venice*] was one of those projects that I had always thought about, but that I continuously postponed. I did not feel ready and I think I was right. Ten years ago I could not shoot *Death in Venice*: it is a work of maturity." Daniela Pasti, "Luchino Visconti parla del suo ultimo film: *Death in Venice*," *Il Mondo* (Rome: March 14, 1971; interview), now reprinted in Adelio Ferrero, *Visconti: Il Cinema* (Modena: Comune di Modena and Reggio Emilia, 1977), p. 74.
4. As Michel Foucault would put it in his "What Is an Author?" in Donald F. Bouchard, ed., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 113-38.
5. It must be noted that in Italian film history, exigent and almost viscous relationships between film criticism and authors have often constituted a constant pattern. From quick and impetuous embracings (i.e., neorealism) to overt denunciations of "bourgeois intimism" (often in former neorealist directors), such capricious critical parables have frequently had (and still have) a profound influence on the reception of authors' work. For the past one might think of Rossellini; for the present, together with the often overlooked Ferreri, Bertolucci and Moretti may be singled out.
6. For the following information and remarks, I am indebted to Carlo Annoni, *Il Decadentismo* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1982), especially chapters 1 and 2; Giorgio Barbieri Squarotti, *Poesia e ideologia borghese* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 1976), pp. 67-118, and *Enciclopedia Einaudi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), vol. IV, v. "Decadentismo."
7. "The very epithet 'decadent,' first uttered by critics encamped on an island of normalcy, is filtered through a positivistic progressive ideology that can define itself only against a negative regressive pole. When writers accept the epithet, when Anatole Baju titles his literary magazine *Le Décadent*, it is to make a statement both semiotic and ideological. 'Le Décadent' collapses the opposition of an identity, denies the existence of an isle of health and of the clear-eyed ones who claim to reside there. There is only decadence, only sickness, and only those who welcome it can represent 'progress.'" Barbara Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to D'Annunzio* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 5.
8. I am here using only the male possessive adjectives because on a macroscopic level, Decadence is mainly a movement of male artists.

9. Other artistic genres, of course, were not left aside; the drama with Maeterlinck and the novel with Huysmans, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Péladran, and D'Annunzio, among others, emphasized the eloquent power of overt sensations and creative vitalisms typical of the artist-hero.
10. *Decadent Genealogies*, p.vii. For the next remarks I am indebted to Spackman's discussion, especially pp. 1-45.
11. Works like *A rebours* (1884) or *Il piacere* (1889) overtly show the use of metalanguage in fictional texts; on the surface of these texts, intertextual references and literary genealogies become part of an aesthetic of refined contemplation, recurring correspondences, and endless allusions. *Death in Venice* (1911) will also reproduce such textual and musical reverberations (Mahler, Wagner, Goethe, Nietzsche).
12. Tommaso Marinetti, "Futurist Manifesto, 11 May 1913," in Pontus Hulten, ed., *Futurism & Futurisms* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), p. 518. (Italics in the original text; translator unspecified.)
13. For this point I am indebted to the remarks Lino Micciché made in his "La Morte a Venezia di Mann: passione in quanto turbamento e degradazione," in the publication of the film script he edited, *Morte a Venezia di Luchino Visconti* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1971), pp. 56-62.
14. Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice* (New York: The Modern Library, 1970), p. 17.
15. The artist's sensuous and perceptive openness to the beauty of Venice after the appearance of Tadzio is quite eloquent; it is in fact an act of personal grasping of reality without any sense of moral necessity or responsibility: "The atmosphere of the city, this slightly foul smell of sea and swamp which he had been so anxious to avoid—he breathed it now in deep, exquisitely painful draughts. Was it possible that he had not known, had not considered, just how much he was attached to all this?" *Death in Venice*, p. 49.
16. Ibid., p. 61.
17. Interestingly enough, in 1911, the young Georg Lukács had written a work, entitled *Soul and Form*, in which he explored the tragic situation of the individual artist caught between his authenticity and death, that is, between his poetic projectuality and the end of his contingent existence. The German edition of this work, *Die Seele und die Formen*, was published that year in Berlin (Egon Fleischel); for an English edition, see *Soul and Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974).
18. Namely in "a character's most fatefully [fulfilling] the meaning of his or her destiny, [or a] character's immersion in the flux and change of everyday historical circumstance." Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 3. For the comparison with Auerbach I am endebted to Marcus (ibid.) who develops her point from René Wellek's *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), especially pp. 236-37, and from Wellek's "Auerbach's Special Realism," *Kenyon Review*, no. 16 (1954), pp. 299-307.
19. For Visconti's discussion of the anthropological ambition (and responsibility) of his cinema, see his "Cinema antropomorfico," *Cinema*, nos. 173-174 (September 25-October 25, 1943), now in David Overbey, ed., *Springtime in Italy: A Reader on Neo-realism* (London: Talisman Books, 1978), pp. 83-85.
20. Depressed and partially paralyzed, he will not be able to complete the editing of the film; he is forced to accept the producer's cut. Four years later, still convalescent, he will direct *The Innocent*, but will not live to see the finished film.
21. In this sense, *Senso* and, most of all, *The Leopard* must be singled out. These details were especially emphasized in *Death in Venice*, where the Hotel des Bains' perfectly recreated decor or the women's hats, together with less visible features like the first pages of the foreign newspapers and the "original" wine labels, may suggest an eloquent disregard for (or overestimation of) the visual possibilities of the medium. They show, I think, a significant distance from a total acceptance of cinema as a technically reproducible medium of expression and a shift toward, instead, classic aesthetics of *truthful performance* closer to theater or stage spectacles. For a study of Visconti's detailed mise-en-scène, see Alessandro Bencivenni, *Luchino Visconti* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1982), pp. 72-79.
22. One might think, among others, of the main scene in the lounge of the hotel, where Aschenbach acknowledges Tadzio; or the final scene where he arrives at the shore seemingly with the musical pace of the Russian aria.
23. Lino Micciché, "Intervista con Franco Mannino," in *Morte a Venezia di Luchino Visconti*, p. 97.
24. "Visconti has in a sense brought the story out of the clouds and down to earth and exposed the material, or rather the pseudo-ontological, content of Aschenbach's obsession. But this vulgar-materialist reduction of discourse to a level of landscape with figures does not demystify, it merely demonstrates incomprehension." Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973), p. 203.
25. In the last part of his career, several criticisms were directed at Visconti by Italian critics who judged his cinema too detached from and indifferent to contemporary issues. The most recent "revenge" of a film critic and historian on Visconti has been Gian Piero Brunetta's: he claims that the last words uttered by Von Aschenbach on the shores—"You have awakened me from a sleep which made me deeply indifferent and deaf like death"—are a declaration of Visconti's own guilt about what he has not been able, or willing, to accomplish as a director by losing contact with critics and political references and making "decadent" art works. (Brunetta, *Storia del Cinema Italiano*, p. 364; these words are not included in the American version of the film.) Not only does it seem strange that Visconti would put such a declaration of failure in the midst of a work like *Death in Venice*, but Brunetta's judgement also seems highly arbitrary: it is not backed up by specific references (an interview, a conversation, an article), but merely assumed from the text and superimposed onto the violent confrontations between Visconti and several contemporary critics.
26. See the previous footnote.

Anne Nesbet

Inanimations

Snow White and *Ivan the Terrible*

Quotations! Quotations! Quotations!
Long ago, Prince Kurbsky, that elegant author of a treatise on punctuation, though in all other respects a traitor to his country, upbraided Tsar Ivan the Terrible for quotations. I quote: "How many holy words you have seized and with what frenzy and ferocity, not just a few lines, not just a few verses, as is the wont of adept scholars (if one needs to write of something, one does so in short words, containing much meaning), but too much, more than good measure, excessively and tiresomely, whole books, whole parables and epistles!"
But there are quotations and quotations. . . .
I understand quotations as outrunners to the right and left of the galloping shaft horse. Sometimes they diverge, but they help to speed the imagination by their broadening, reinforcing parallel run. As long as one does not let go of the reins!

S. M. Eisenstein[1]

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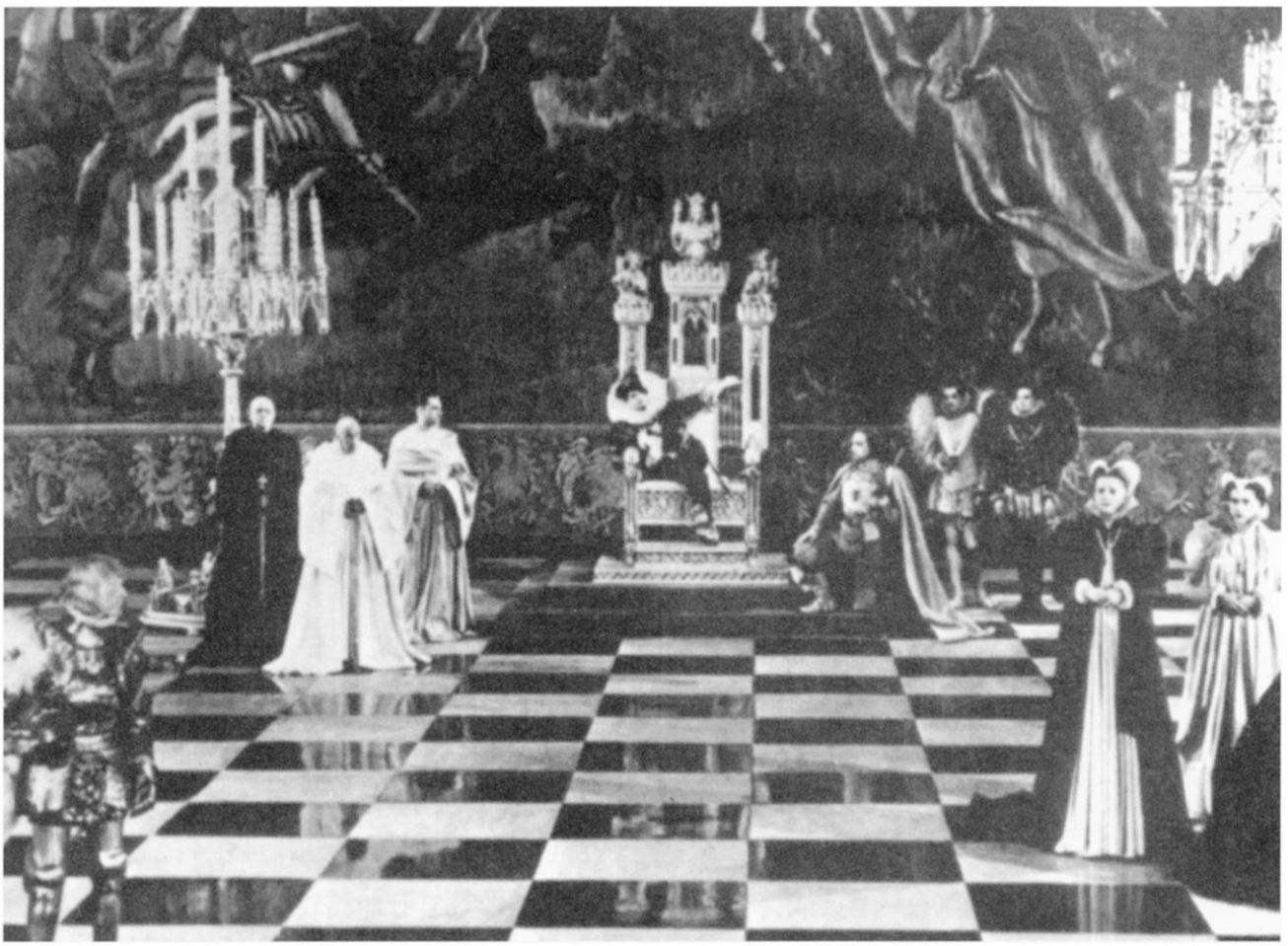
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs



Ivan the Terrible

When the editors of Eisenstein's collected works in Russian describe the vast intellectual spadework that went into Eisenstein's preparations for *Ivan the Terrible*, they quite naturally emphasize the weightier aspects of his research: "In the course of work on the scenario," they say, "Eisenstein studied an enormous quantity of material—chronicles and eyewitness accounts of Ivan the Terrible's contemporaries, folklore and iconography, the works of historians and the work of his predecessors on his theme."[2] Not mentioned in this impressive list is another source of inspiration—a real "outrunner," to follow Eisenstein's equine analogy—one encountered by the director a little more than a month before he accepted the *Ivan* project in January 1941.

In a notebook entry dated November 21, 1940, Eisenstein recalls three scenes from stories he encountered in childhood: an Arab, caught between an angry camel and a precipice, who forgets everything as he reaches for a few red berries; angels who dispense a few drops of comfort in hell; Esmeralda giving a suffering Quasimodo something to drink on the scaffold:

> While watching Disney's *Snow White*, I recall these three scenes.
> But not because Snow White kisses the funny and ugly gnomes one by one on their bald heads; not because a flock of no less elegant deer and wild goats follows behind her; and not because she is surrounded by fairy tale terrors and horrors.
> But because Disney's works themselves strike me as the same kind of drop of comfort, an instant of relief, a fleeting touch of lips in the hell of social burdens, injustices and torments, in which the circle of his American viewers is forever trapped.[3]

A reader familiar with the rules and paradigms of Soviet criticism fully expects the next point to be a pious condemnation of Disney's lack of political

commitment and irrelevance to the class struggle, but here Eisenstein surprises us.[4] While admitting that, to be sure, "the triumphant proletariat of the future will erect no monument to Disney as a fighter either in their hearts, or on street squares" (*Disney* 8), Eisenstein does not fault Disney, whom he had met—and liked—in Hollywood in 1930, for what might usually (in the Soviet context) appear to be the mortal sin of social irrelevance; instead he makes the extraordinary declaration that "Disney is simply 'beyond good and evil'" (*Disney* 9), putting a Nietzschean twist on what amounts to an even more scandalous assertion—that the art of Walt Disney is somehow to be located *beyond the class struggle*.[5] Described by Eisenstein in positive terms that, strangely enough, come within a hair's breadth of the notoriously negative "opiate of the masses," Disney's medicine chest of animated anodynes evidently contains potions that Eisenstein finds appealing. He speaks of the drug-like effect of Disney's works not with a Communist's moral outrage, but with real affection:

> And Disney, like all of them, through the magic of his works and more intensely, perhaps, than anyone else, bestows precisely this upon his viewer, precisely *obliviousness* [zabvenie], an instant of complete and total release from everything connected with the suffering caused by the social conditions of the social order of the largest capitalist government. (*Disney* 8, emphasis added)

It is astonishing how eloquently Eisenstein, famous for earlier attempts to create a cinema based on shocking its viewers with dialectical truths (the "montage of attractions"), here defends the virtues of "obliviousness," a state generally associated, he admits a page later, with "evil" (*Disney* 9). But in the special case of Disney, obliviousness is a gift to the masses rather than their downfall. After all,

> Even the string of a bow can't be strained forever.
> The same for the nerves.
> And instants of this "releasing" . . . are just as prophylactically necessary as the daily dose of carefree laughter in the well-known American saying: "A laugh a day keeps the doctor away." (*Disney* 8)

Lurking very near the surface here is the even better-known American saying concerning apples and doctors, a proverb Disney's Evil Queen takes a wicked delight in perverting as she peddles a beautiful, healthy-looking apple drenched in the potion known as the "Sleeping Death." Could there be a connection between the benevolent "obliviousness" Disney grants his viewers and the "Sleeping Death" presented by the witch to Snow White? Certainly if Disney in general—and *Snow White* in particular—can be said to have taken the role of the (possibly poisoned) apple for Eisenstein, it was an apple the Soviet director could not or did not wish to resist. Over the next few years, as Eisenstein worked on his *Ivan* project, *Snow White* was clearly often on his mind, and sometimes, we might even venture to say, on the tip of his tongue.[6]

What was it about Disney's work that made it, as Eisenstein reiterates over the years, so "attractive" (*Disney* 21), even (as he writes in late 1941, shortly after being evacuated with the major film studios to Alma-Ata) "the most appealing I've ever met" (*Disney* 41)?[7] This was a question Eisenstein returned to again and again. The key to the charm of Disney's animation lay for him in the mysteries of a contour that has learned to exceed itself; the name he gave this phenomenon is "plasmaticness":

> Here we have a being represented in drawing, a being of a definite form, a being which has attained a definite appearance, and which behaves like the primal protoplasm, not yet possessing a "stable" form, but capable of assuming any form and which, skipping along the rungs of the evolutionary ladder, attaches itself to any and all forms of animal existence.
> Why is the sight of this so attractive? . . . .
> This picture is inescapably attractive through its trait of all-possible diversity of forms. (*Disney* 21)

Disney's animated characters allow the viewer to venture vicariously "back down the evolutionary ladder" (*Disney* 21, slightly corrected) to those primordial times when existence is all possibility, identity a future potential rather than a present constraint. In Alma-Ata a year later, Eisenstein delighted himself by discovering the link between "plasmaticness" and "ecstasy":

> In terms of their material, Disney's pictures are pure ecstasy—all the traits of ecstasy

(the immersion of *self* in nature and animals, etc.).
Their comicality lies in the fact that the *process* of ecstasy is represented as an *object:* literalized, formalized.
That is, Disney is an example (within the general formula of the comical) of a case of *formal ecstasy*!!! (Great!) . . .
Ecstasy is a sensing and experiencing of the primal "omnipotence"—the element of "coming into being"—the "plasmaticness" of existence, from which *everything* can arise. (*Disney* 42, 46)

What Eisenstein loved about Disney's characters was the way their contours could work constant "plasmatic" miracles of metamorphosis (he was particularly fond of remarking on the stretchiness of the characters' necks).[8] Disney's creatures were free to romp through an infinite number of identities and morphologies, in what Eisenstein referred to at one point as a "unique protest against the metaphysical immobility of the once-and-forever given" (*Disney* 33). The natural element that Eisenstein (at great length!) compares in the notes of 1940 to the plasmaticness of Disney is *fire*. Eisenstein runs through a kaleidoscopic series of references to the meaning and images of fire: ranging from Disney's "The Moth and the Flame" through German analyses of the sexual nature of the crime of arson, to Wagner, Nero, Gorky, and Zola (*Disney* 24-32). This part of his argument also nods to the Disney film he had been watching most recently: "The ghostly mask which prophesies to the witch in *Snow White*, appears in . . . fire. And what, if not fire, is capable of most fully conveying the dream of a flowing diversity of forms?!" (*Disney* 24).

With *Snow White* and *Ivan the Terrible* in mind, we might perhaps take that last remark as a *real* rather than *rhetorical* question, for strangely missing from the long discussion of fire that follows (as well as almost entirely absent from the discussion of plasmaticness in general) is another highly plasmatic phenomenon that Eisenstein was to make the object of very serious experimentation as he worked with the *Ivan* material: that phenomenon is shadow.[9] In our everyday lives, shadow (even more than—but not entirely disassociated from—fire) is the place where ordinary existence meets the miraculous plasmaticness of constant metamorphosis; all people living in a place with a light source and a wall will soon rediscover the potential for dogs and rabbits latent in their own ordinary hands.[10]

When Eisenstein did mention the use of shadow in Disney, it was disapprovingly: "I shall always love Disney and his heroes, from Mickey Mouse to Willy the Whale. Their agile figures are also animals, also linear, and at their best without shadows or shading . . . " (*IM* 42). But what he really seems to be objecting to here is not the shadow per se, but the use of shadow to make the animated figure more "real," more three-dimensional, and thus less *linear.* What's striking about the use of shadow in *Snow White* is how the shadows occasionally emancipate themselves from their own figures and thus recuperate the power of the linear contour for themselves. When the dwarfs are marching home along a cliff and their huge giant shadows march in one direction while their little dwarf "bodies" march in another, the shadow as such is beginning to discover its own "plasmaticness." The shadows in *Snow White* are not merely fuzzy puddles testifying to the animators' clever understanding of light; they are contour in the process of rediscovering its own strengths. In one gag, as the dwarfs search the house for the monstrous invader who has swept the floor and removed the cobwebs, Doc's shadow turns and whispers to the shadow following it, a textbook example of how a "contour" may, as Eisenstein claims, "begin to take on an independent life" (*Disney* 59).

One of the most persistent formal themes in *Ivan the Terrible* (especially in Part I) is likewise the motif of the gradually *emancipated shadow*, and although this play with shadow obviously owes a great deal to the German Expressionist tradition,[11] Expressionism is here mediated by Disney. *Ivan*'s armed warriors, like *Snow White*'s dwarfs, gradually acquire the ability to march more or less independently across the walls; early in *Ivan the Terrible* the shadows are blurry and indistinct (with some notable emblematic exceptions, like the double-headed eagle on *Ivan*'s cheek during the coronation scene and the great shadow cast by a candlestick on the wall), but as the film gathers momentum, the shadows grow clearer and clearer, their contours ever more distinct. At several points Eisenstein demonstrates the amazing ability of huge shadows to shrink themselves to the size of tiny dwarf-size doorways (figures 1a, b, and c).

This echoes Snow White's stooping entrance into the dwarfs' cottage: as in the terrifying claustro- and agoraphobic incommensurability

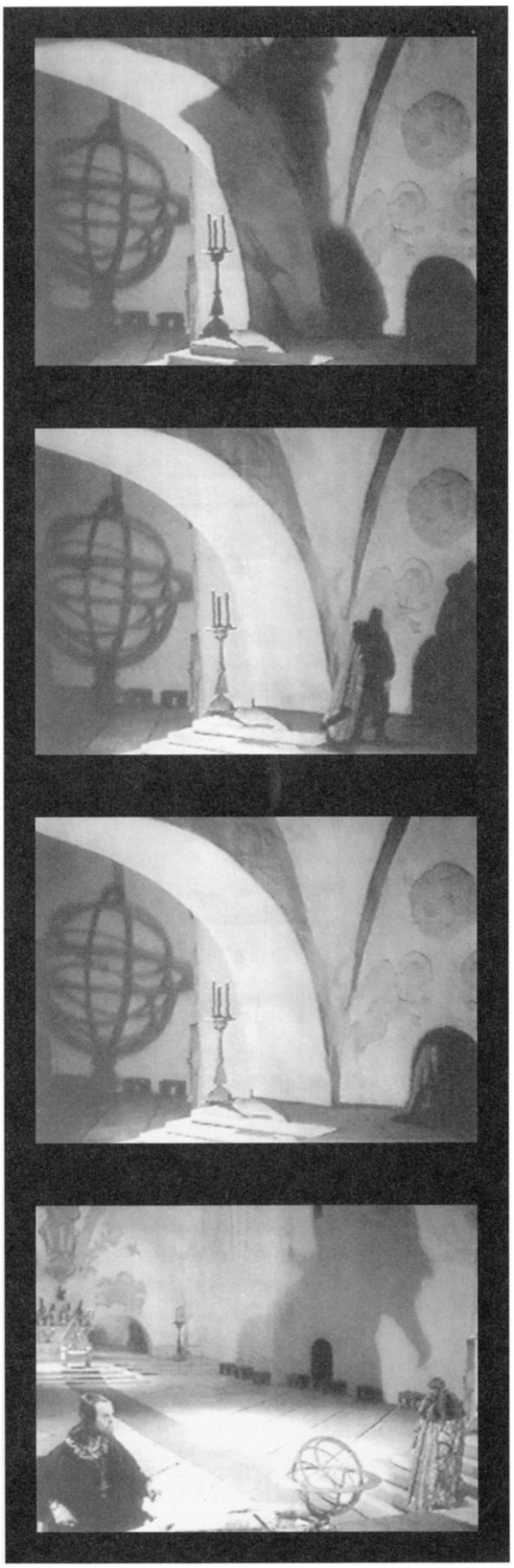


Figure 1
a) First the shadow . . .

b) then the Tsar . . .

c) exit through a little low doorway.

Figure 2
Ivan's shadow emancipated

of the architectural spaces of Ivan with the figures, always too small or too large, who inhabit them, Snow White is also the wrong size for the miniature-but-huge home of the dwarfs.[12] In both cases, the figure must always be remolding its contours to fit its impossible environment.[13]

The climax of the shadow motif comes in the scene in which Ivan discusses policy with Nepeya, his ambassador to England. On the wall is projected a huge shadow of Ivan in profile, looming over another one of those little doorways, and at other times over the equally dramatic shadow of the globe. But the shadow that achieves the greatest degree of "emancipation" is the Ivan profile, which in its vastest incarnation is evidently no longer attached to any real figure, but seems rather to have been cast with the help of a large cutout (figure 2). Here the tables are really turned, as the demands of the shadow have the figure in thrall: the actor Cherkasov must freeze, must imitate the actions of his own "shadow." Meanwhile the shadow's emancipation is marked by its awkward attempts to move despite the separation from the figure of Ivan.[14] The shadow's lower jaw is made to move as Ivan speaks—*as if* the shadow were still subservient, but now that he's emancipated, the movements are jerky, a pallid shadow of live beings' movements. As it emancipates itself, the shadow discovers that the price of independence is, strangely enough, *inanimation.*

Before we decide that the cutout's awkwardly jerking jaw is a sign of failed emancipation, or that its fall into "inanimation" marks a defeat (just another robot failing to make the leap into genuine humanness), we should note that "inanimation" is in fact precisely the fate of the *human* figure in *Ivan the Terrible*. The trembling jaw of the huge shadow echoes the slight shake to which human limbs are prone in *Ivan*, as the actors attempt to force their own contours into extraordinary poses at impossibly slow speeds—in short, to *inanimate* themselves. Thus the huge shadow, just when it finds itself emancipated but DEhumanized, is actually closer to being a "real human being" than it probably realizes. Hidden in *Ivan* is a parable of the complicated and jealous relationship between "real" and "animated" figures.

Stalin himself reportedly admired the actor Nikolai Cherkasov's incredible ability to shape and reshape himself on demand.[15] We find ourselves again in the realm of "plasmaticness." Where does Ivan's hugely overextended neck come from, after

all? At least partly (with all due respect to its other eminent parents, the great Meyerhold among them) from a not particularly aristocratic ancestor:

> Mickey starts to sing, his hands folded together. The hands echo the music as only the movements of Disney's characters are capable of echoing a melody. And then reaching for a high note, the arms shoot up far beyond the limits of their normal representation. In tone to the music, they stretch far beyond the length allotted them. The necks of his surprised horses stretch the same way, or their legs become extended when running. (*Disney* 10)

In *Ivan*, the contours of the human figure are tortured in order to create a grotesque imitation of a cartoon figure's plasmatic lines. In Disney this plasmaticness of contour leads to comedy, to "formal ecstasy"; in *Ivan* the effect is grotesque, contorted, forever reminding us of the *pain* involved when a figure trapped within a three-dimensional universe, where the rules of physics still apply, is asked to behave as if he were fundamentally linear. This strain is part of the essential sensibility of *Ivan.*[16]

Even in animation, however, certain characters are by necessity more plasmatic than others (not all contours are created equal). In the production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the dwarfs could be relatively plasmatic and grotesque, with no harm done, but Snow White was another thing entirely. She should not be particularly comic or, certainly, grotesque! The solution hit on by Disney was to bring in a real girl (Marge Belcher, later destined for fame as Marge Champion) as a model for his animated princess. By studying Marge's movements as she danced and twirled, the animators could avoid letting any of Snow White's contours get too plasmatic for their own good. Snow White needs a dose of "inanimation" (provided by the "real girl") to keep her from becoming too grotesque.

But this is not the last twist of the spiral in the animation/inanimation story of *Snow White*: the presence of a flesh-and-blood model as a guarantee of realism, as a concrete tie to the real world, is no failsafe antidote for "excessive plasmaticness." The very models who were to serve as the animated characters' anchor in realism were themselves selected for their almost inhuman elasticity, their ability (to echo Stalin's praise of Cherkasov) to reshape themselves—in short, for their ability to imitate the plasmatic moves of animated characters. Thus the dwarfs (relatively "plasmatic" characters) had their "real life" models, too, and one of those was none other than the very Marge Belcher brought in to save Snow White from her potentially too-mobile contours (to keep her, one might say, from looking like a dwarf). Indeed, in one of the film's most plasmatic moments, Belcher obligingly served as model (wrapped in a baggy overcoat) for *two dwarfs at once*, when for the "Silly Song" dance, Dopey gets on Sneezy's shoulders to dance with the (also modeled by Belcher) lovely and non-grotesque Snow White.

Not only are these these figures in multiple layers of disguise, they are also what one might properly term "in drag," where the boundaries between male and female, real person and animated character, are shown to be contingent and malleable.[17] Many layers of drag are functioning here: a girl who becomes two dwarfs who become a man; a "real" girl in drag as a "cartoon" girl; animated characters dressing up in the form of "real people." As a special kind of play with one's form in which the contours of an identity are exaggerated, the concept of drag reflects and emends Eisenstein's more abstract idea of "plasmaticness." A plasmatic figure is one that revels in its ability to change form, but adding drag to the equation allows us to think of contour as a kind of costume, one that can be made to take on a series of exaggerated, momentarily frozen forms. The costume of contour can be shifted at will—with the caveat that such costume-changing can be very difficult or even painful. For the heart of the practice of drag lies in the ephemeral fixing of identity, the exaggerated *fixing* rather than fluid *mobility* of contour. (Although the costume or identity can be changed, it is no longer in constant, protoplasmic flux.)[18]

The *Ivan* films add another of layer of costume and shifting identities to the equation. Let us consider a scene that seems at least partly modeled, strangely enough, on the dwarfs' dance with Snow White: the famous "Dance of the Oprichniki" from *Ivan, Part II.*[19] Here again we see a band of merry men singing and dancing, with a pale "princess" in the midst of them. The female figure, with its "crown" and stiff, white mask, leaps about in the dance and conceals the flexible form of Fyodor—in drag, we might claim, as a monstrous and totemic variation on Snow White (Snow White as potentially murderous puppet). Fyodor's jolly face, which peeps out from behind this mask as he sings

Figure 3
Fyodor and mask

Figure 4
Vladimir with candle

Figure 5
Dopey with candle

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his own set of "chastushki," could not be in greater contrast to the frozen features of the mask,[20] but the words he sings contain, needless to say, a threat.[21] (Figures 3) In this case, the "Silly Song" of the *oprichniki* is one that despite the sound and look of nonsense contains a very non-nonsensical message, one that anyone should be able to read (but one that evidently escapes the simpleton Vladimir). Indeed, the doomed Vladimir plays out with his all-powerful cousin Ivan a tragic and grotesque version of his cartoon prototype Dopey's unrequited infatuation with Snow White. Tsar Ivan exploits most adeptly his "role" as poor "orphan," chased by an Evil Queen (Efrosinia, of course), in his seduction of Vladimir: "An orphan I am and abandoned, with nobody to love me or pity me" (Eizenshtein VI, 347). The theme of the orphan is, of course, central also to *Snow White*; not only is the title character herself an orphan, but it's the thought that "perhaps they HAVE no mother!" that endears to her the "untidy little children" she originally imagines the dwarfs to be).

Ivan's seduction succeeds when he has persuaded Vladimir to don the tsar's robes for that fateful procession into the cathedral. Vladimir, in short, is also "in drag," this time as tsar (though one should also point out the unremitting exaggeration of the feminine side of Vladimir's features throughout *Ivan*—his face, indeed, seems painted as almost a caricature of a woman's face—so in a sense he has been in some kind of drag all along). His manipulation of his contours into the drag of tsardom turns out to be his undoing, of course, as the assassin intending to kill Ivan makes do with the mere caricature of Ivan. Like the frozen mask of the white lady that is the highlight of Fyodor's costume, the tsar's robes weigh on Vladimir; he walks stiffly as he heads toward what even he senses (as the famous "blue blush" reminds us, a blush that Eisenstein himself compares to that of the skunk in *Bambi*[22]) are the perilous depths of the cathedral. In fact, Vladimir must learn the fatal lesson that some identities, some contours, lend themselves above all to inanimation.

This moment, too, has a predecessor in *Snow White*, in the scene in which a reluctant, quavery Dopey is sent upstairs to face the possible monster Snow White turns out not to be (figures 4 and 5).[23]

It is in its dark reshaping and reinterpretation of the contours it takes wholesale from its Disney predecessor that *Ivan* really devastates *Snow White*. Everywhere where "good" and "evil" are clearly marked in the American cartoon, Eisenstein adds layer upon layer of contradiction and ambiguity. If even Ivan (in his relationship with the Dopey-like Vladimir) can play the role of "Snow White," then Dopey may be right to run frantically from the monstrous flapping bedsheet! The very identification of white with "innocence" or "virtue" is a theme *Ivan the Terrible* makes mincemeat of (following here in the tracks laid in a lot of very artificial snow by the white-clad evil German invaders of *Aleksander Nevsky*). As Efrosinia mutters when

the evil but white-draped Pimen suggests that the sacrifice of Filipp will do their cause more good than his rescue: "White is the raiment, but black the soul" («Bel klobuk, no cherna dusha» Eizenshtein VI, 340). In the film Efrosinia punctuates this statement by revealing the white headdress beneath her own black shawl.

In the case of Efrosinia, we are not surprised to find a black soul lurking beneath whatever white garment she may feel like putting on; however, a subtle lesson running under the surface of *Ivan the Terrible* is that there can be *no* "Snow White" without a touch of blackness somewhere. The prime example of this rule is the unremittingly white figure of Anastasia: who is shown "adoring" her Tsar and husband; who is murdered by the "Evil Queen" (Efrosinia) by means of a poisoned goblet (that closely resembles the cup from which the Evil Queen in *Snow White* sips the potion that turns her into a witch); who lies dead but as if asleep on a bier surrounded by candles and mourning men; and so on. . . . But Anastasia is an ambivalent character as well, as Eisenstein uses his polyphonic editing to tell us. Should she really be exclaiming "akh!" and falling back on her sickbed at the mere sound of Kurbsky's name? Anastasia's relentless association with the color white does not save her from the character's moral ambiguities.[24]

The faithful lowborn Maliuta, the tsar's watchdog and eye, would probably agree with Grumpy (to whom, it must be said, he bears something of a physical resemblance), who says about the sleeping Snow White in particular, and all women in general, in response to Bashful's "She's beautiful! Just like an angel!": "Angel! Heh! She's a female! And all females is pizen! They're full of wicked wiles!"

The ambivalences in Ivan's character hardly need to be reiterated here. But if we stay devoted to the theme of shifting contour, borrowed identity, and ambiguous use of "animation," it is worth pointing out that the very transformation of Ivan that occurs over the course of the two completed parts of the project echoes neatly a transformation central to *Snow White*. There, the Evil Queen is a beautiful, if severe, creature who stands straight and tall. To carry out her plan to poison the princess, she chooses to try a disguising potion, one that will turn her into an ugly hag (or rather, the moral seems to be, to turn her into the ugly witch she truly is inside already). As her fingers claw up and her shoulders hunch over and she adopts the dark hooded garment of any witch or peddlar, she grows closer and closer in appearance to the old Tsar Ivan, whose contours (as we have mentioned above) are made to shift as he "ages." The two figures (the witch as witch and the old Ivan as witch) are remarkably similar in appearance; Ivan too (though his transformation takes place over a considerably longer amount of time) develops a stoop and wizened features, and puts on a black hood.

If the relationship of a character to his/her shifting contours is tortured, that certainly does not mean that "ecstasy" is excluded, but rather that the kind of ecstasy achieved through the imposition of a kind of slow plasmatic deformation on the inherently non-plasmatic human form is different (perhaps more perverse) than the thrill of possibility conveyed by Disney's animated contours. Here we find ourselves moving from the play of *shapes in the flames* Eisenstein found so attractive to the *effect* of those flames on a human being, an effect which Eisenstein also found profoundly "appealing" from childhood on. In his memoirs, Eisenstein describes the dangerous thrill of illicit glances into the works of Mirbeau and Masoch, and then relates a sort of "primal scene" from his own childhood (a primal scene experienced, appropriately enough, at the cinema):

> I came in contact with the alarming vein of cruelty much earlier through a living impression, a living impression from the cinema screen.
> It was one of the earliest films I ever saw, no doubt produced by Pathé.
> The story took place during the Napoleonic Wars. In the house of a blacksmith was a military billet. The young wife of the blacksmith commits adultery with a young Empire sergeant. The husband finds out, catches and binds the sergeant. Throws him in the hayloft. He tears off the soldier's uniform, baring his shoulders, and brands him with a red-hot iron.
> I remember vividly the naked shoulder, a great iron bar in the muscular hands of the blacksmith, the black smoke and white steam rising from the charred flesh. . . .
> The scene of branding remains ineradicably in my memory to this very day.
> In childhood it tortured me with nightmares. I imagined it at night. I saw myself either as the sergeant or the blacksmith. I

> caught hold of the bare shoulders. Sometimes they seemed to be mine, sometimes someone else's. It was never clear who was branding whom. For many years fair hair (the sergeant was blond) or black barrels and Napoleonic uniforms inevitably recalled that scene to my memory. Indeed, I developed a partiality for the Empire style.
>
> No ocean of cruelty, such as permeates my own films, has yet drowned—like that sea of fire that swallowed the brand of the convict—the early impressions of that ill-starred film. (*IM* 32–33)

Endless, fiery shape-changing may be a perfect example of "formal ecstasy," but the cruel *limit* set on identity by the *brand* has its own erotic attraction for Eisenstein, an erotic effect that branding in Eisenstein's aesthetic universe shares with many forms of piercing, with bullfights, with the rape of Europa . . . .[25] If the free flow of identity is "inescapably attractive" (*Disney* 21), *so too is the moment when identity is suddenly, inescapably fixed by the brand.*

All of Eisenstein's later works are affected by his encounter with Disney's animated art. The synchronized sound (and its more aristocratic theoretical cousin, "vertical montage") of *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) testify to the lessons learned by both Eisenstein and Prokofiev from the creator of Mickey Mouse and the *Silly Symphonies*, a relationship traced for us recently by Russell Merritt.[26] Where *Alexander Nevsky* emphasizes animation as synchronized *motion, Ivan the Terrible* forces us (and motion) to stop in our tracks, to take the process of metamorphosis frame by frame. Run as a series of frames rather than as a fluid fast-flowing illusion, plasmaticness reveals its darker nature (figure 6).

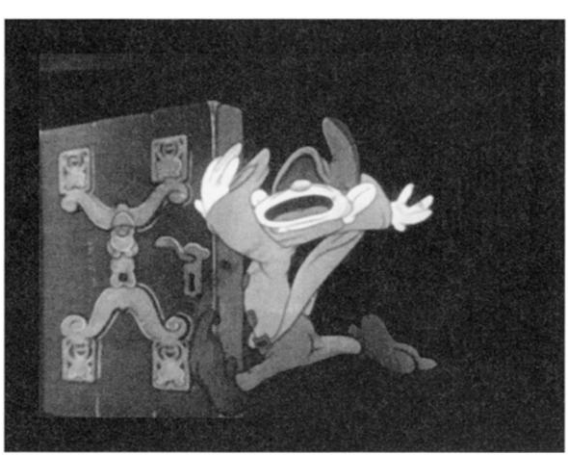

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Figure 6
"Ouch!"

It is something about the intense erotic painfulness of *Ivan the Terrible*, Parts I and II, that brings them close to—and yet not quite within—the definition of "camp," as Susan Sontag describes that elusive category in her famous "Notes on Camp": "The essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (275); "Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style—but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the 'off,' of things-being-what-they-are-not" (279).[27] Sontag says of the Ivan films that

> A work can come close to Camp, but not make it, because it succeeds. Eisenstein's films are seldom Camp because, despite all exaggeration, they do succeed (dramatically) without surplus. If they were a little more "off," they could be great Camp—particularly *Ivan the Terrible I & II.* (284)

Ivan the Terrible is just slightly too "serious," too "tragic," to make it as "camp" (in which, she insists, "there is never, never tragedy" [287]); *Snow White* would presumably be just off the edge at the other extreme ("without passion, one gets pseudo-Camp—what is merely decorative, safe, in a word, chic" [284]); taken together, these two films mark the boundaries of some unstable, fluctuating realm. They certainly share the fundamental preoccupation with contour that Sontag describes as essential to camp:

> Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman." To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater. (280)

If this fundamental sensibility ends up, via plasmaticness, giving *Snow White* its magic power to convey sweet "oblivion," *Ivan the Terrible* puts the same interest in identity and transformation to very different use. In *Ivan*, "being" may well be "playing a role," but playing a role hurts. Here we may want to question Sontag's claim that since "to emphasize style is to slight content, . . . It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical" (277). Indeed, it seems to me that Eisenstein uses *Snow White* as a kind of costume trunk for *Ivan*'s sadis-

tic—and political—theater: instead of the "free play of signifiers," we have in Ivan's multivalent appropriation of *Snow White*'s forms and figures a move towards the *unfree play of identities*, allowing practice in many formal variations on an essential theme: that is, "Ways to be—or be with—a sadistic beloved." Just as in the young Eisenstein's dreams "it was never clear who was branding whom," *Ivan* allows a formal rehearsal of the many painful versions of "*kto-kogo*" (as the Russians say): of "*who* does what to *whom*." It is tempting to approach *Ivan* armed with that simple and appealing formula, "Ivan = X," where the "X" may be Stalin, or Meyerhold, or Eisenstein, or Eisenstein's papa, but *Snow White*'s presence in Eisenstein's film reminds us that there are many more variables than X involved.[28] ("Snow White" can be played by Anastasiia, by Fyodor, by Vladimir, by Ivan; both Efrosiniia and Ivan can try out the role of the Evil Queen, and so on.) The real calculus comes in the relations *between* these characters, as they are branded and rebranded with new identities. This strange sort of arrested plasmaticness hurts, but *Ivan* teaches us to recognize that pain, too, can function as a little low doorway into the dark spaces where something waits for us: not an assassin this time, perhaps, nor an orphaned princess stretching her arms under the bedsheets, but art.

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Notes

1. Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories*, trans. Herbert Marshall (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), pp. 185-86. Further citation as *IM*. Published in Russian as "Avtobiograficheskie zapiski" in S. M. Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), pp. 203–540.
2. Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Vol. 6 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971), p. 548. The editors of this volume are listed as P. M. Atasheva (deceased), I. V. Vaisfel'd, N. B. Volkova, Iu. A. Krasovskii, S. I. Freilikh, R. N. Iurenev; editor-in-chief S. I. Iutkevich.
3. *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda, trans. Alan Upchurch (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1986), p. 7. Future citation in the text as *Disney*. The Russian edition can be found in A. V. Prokhorov, B. V. Raushenbakh, F. S. Khitruk, eds., *Problemy sinteza v khudozhestvennoi kul'ture* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), pp. 205–84. The editor of the Eisenstein material for both editions is Naum Kleiman.
4. A more ordinary instance of condemnation of bourgeois drops of comfort appears in Lev Kuleshov's 1935 *Principles of Montage*, in the course of a directorial mea culpa: "That is where our deepest mistake lay. Perceiving the petty bourgeois axioms of American montage and American morality in their entirety, we introduced elements of bourgeois art into our own films unintentionally—a 'consoling,' bourgeois morality, and so on; and that is why, along with a certain benefit derived from the uncritical study of American montage, came great harm." *Kuleshov on Film*, trans. and ed. Ronald Levaco (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 183–95; 191.
5. The invitation here to read Disney as an essentially Nietzschean phenomenon—and thus to short-circuit our present path and declare ourselves already in the company of Ivan the Terrible, whose position "beyond good and evil" would seem beyond question—should perhaps be tempered somewhat by Eisenstein's next lines: "Disney is simply 'beyond good and evil.' Like the sun, like trees, like birds, like the ducks and mice, deer and pigeons that run across his screen. To an even greater degree than Chaplin" (*Disney* 9). This is a "superman," in other words, drawn with big, lovable, infantile features.
6. Eisenstein's passion for *Snow White* was shared by his collaborator, Sergei Prokofiev, who had seen the film in Denver in 1938 and insisted on being shown it again, and who deepens the "vertical" axis of *Ivan*'s citational plundering of Disney in his score for Eisenstein's film, writing music that at times provides a melancholy Slavic echo of *Snow White*'s decidedly lower-brow ditties. Compare for instance the scene in *Snow White* that introduces us to the seven dwarfs as they "dig dig dig dig dig dig dig" in the mines with the obviously imitative "mining" of Kazan in *Ivan the Terrible, Part I.* Not only does the latter film provide a visual quotation (Ivan's men digging are framed by their cavern just as the dwarfs are framed by theirs), but it also plays this scene as a musical number, the dwarfs' work song transformed into a minor-key (but equally rhythmic) meditation on war preparation.
7. This phrase is in English in the original (*Problemy sinteza* 241); in the translation, for some reason, it appears as "the most omni-appealing I've ever met."
8. "The independently elongating contour is read as a 'neck going out of itself.' And then it skips over to a comical embodiment of the formula of pathos and ecstasy" (*Disney* 58, 1941); "This is the plasmatizing of solid objects: the stretching of necks, legs, the rhythmical swaying of trees, of solid figures, etc. . . ." (*Disney* 69, 1932); "The necks of his surprised horses stretch the same way, or their legs become extended when running" (*Disney* 10, 1940). As we'll see, the phenomenon of the stretched neck has significant consequences for the actors in *Ivan the Terrible.*
9. His mention of "silhouettes" in the notes from 1941 is quite brief: "The *stroke drawing*, as a line, with only

one contour, is the very earliest type of drawing—cave drawings.

In my opinion, this is not yet a consciously creative act, but the simple automatism of 'outlining a contour.' It is a roving eye, from which movement the hand has not yet been separated (into an independent movement).

This is preceded by the stage when simply the *whole* man *encircles* an object, making a drawing *with himself* (there is an element of this in the Acropolis).

The silhouette drawing has its own attractiveness, evidently on the basis of this (cf. Japanese silhouettes as such in the book on silhouettes)" (*Disney* 43).

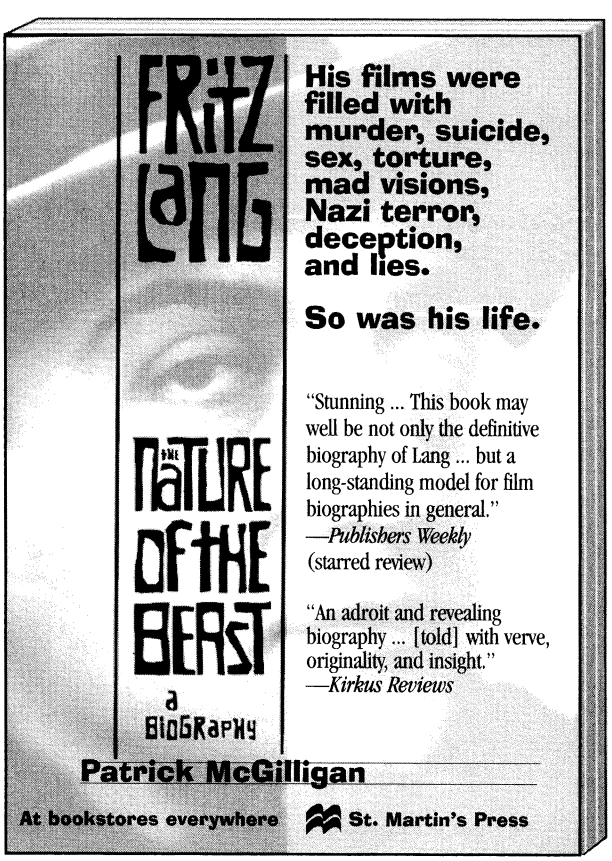
10. One example of this has recently come into my hands: a little Soviet desk calendar for children from the year 1938, a curio mixing lessons in the history of Soviet aviation and treacly pictures of children hugging Stalin with advice on pleasant and edifying activities for indoors or out; on February 2, 1938, the child readers are given detailed instructions for the construction of a "Teatr tenei," a "Shadow Theater."
11. See Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein's* Ivan the Terrible: *A Neoformalist Analysis* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 173–202, for a thorough discussion of *Ivan*'s "Expressionistic mise-en-scène."
12. The dwarfs' cottage is a classic example of those magical structures that are distinctly larger on the inside than they are on the outside. Compare the view given "externally" of this "doll's house" of a cottage (as Snow White describes it) with the relatively cavernous spaces Disney reveals to us inside it. Where for example does that enormous antechamber/washroom come from? In a very *Einstein*ian gag, the space of the dwarfs' main room s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-s as one of Sneezy's omnipotent blasts sends everyone sliding through it.
13. This environmental component of *Ivan* and *Snow White* should also remind us of Eisenstein's ongoing interest in the effect of context on human life and activity. As he remarks in a strangely meandering note headlined "Alma-Ata, 4.XI.1941": "A new setting dictates a new modus in which to work: there is no material to quote from on hand. The modus is prompted by . . . *Ivan the Terrible*. There, it's done this way: episode follows episode, and all the Beleg-Material [supporting material] of ideas is *als Anhang* [like an appendix]. Perhaps there is an outlet and salvation in this: in Moscow, I was 'drowning' in citations. Perhaps this 'new' approach will help to focus correctly the *essence* of the ideas, and it will be possible to embellish in an appendix. It's funny—I'm writing in the same small handwriting that I used during . . . the Civil War! The identicalness of setting engenders, etc? Put more simply: no paper!

    Walt Disney's work is the most omni-appealing I've ever met" (*Disney* 41). [In the Russian version, this last line is in English, but it reads "Walt Disney's work—the most appealing I've ever met."]

    This is a very rich quote: Eisenstein the inveterate researcher is in Alma-Ata not just without paper, but without his library: material conditions change his handwriting. To Eisenstein, who was very tempted by the thought that handwriting encapsulates the personality (thus he relates in an anecdote in *Nonindifferent Nature* how a German graphologist, Raphael Sherman, in 1929 was able to take one summary glance at him, grab a pen, and write with Eisenstein's own handwriting [see Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, trans. Herbert Marshall (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 341]), it seems only fitting that the very contours of the self must change as Eisenstein moves away from the Soviet center (he had just recently been evacuated from Moscow). Perhaps this shift in context would serve to reinforce the "appeal" of the world of Disney, where evolutionary metamorphosis is super-Lamarckian, even instantaneous.
14. The theme of the emancipated shadow runs through the folk and fairy-tale traditions of many countries; E.T.A. Hoffman, Hans-Christian Andersen, Chamosso; the most recent (with respect to the *Ivan* chronology) member of this genealogy being Evgenii Shvarts's short-running drama, *Ten'* (*The Shadow*), in 1940.
15. "Stalin says to Cherkasov that he can really transform himself, and that another of our artists who can also transform himself is Khmelev." This rather plodding bit of praise comes from the description of a meeting Eisenstein and Grigorii Alexandrov had with Stalin in February 1947; the "transcript" was dictated right after the meeting to Sergei Agapov and signed by Eisenstein and Alexandrov. See G. P. Mar'iamov, *Kremlevskii tsenzor* (Moscow: Konfederatsiia soiuzov kinematografistov "Kinotsentr", 1992), p. 88.
16. Later in his life, Nikolai Cherkasov would reflect more than once on the strain of literally embodying Eisenstein's graphic visions, as the endless drawings Eisenstein used as a sort of "first draft" of *Ivan the Terrible* were brought to life ("animated") by the actors. The director's achievements, complains Cherkasov, came at the price of "not infrequently constraining me within the cruel frames of his graphic and pictorial intent"; "during the numerous rehearsals and shoots devoted to the mental anguish of Ivan, I thus was not once able to free myself from the sensation of physical constraint, which hampered to the highest degree my efforts as an actor." (*Nikolai Cherkasov*, ed. N. N. Cherkasova and S. Dreiden [Moscow: Vserossiiskoe teatral'noe obshchestvo, 1976], pp. 101; 158.)
17. See Marge Garber's interesting discussion of transvestism as a sign of "category crisis" generally in *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992). She defines drag as "the theoretical and deconstructive social practice that analyzes these structures from within, by putting in question the 'naturalness' of gender roles through the discourse of clothing and body parts" (151), and also cites Judith Butler: "In imitating a gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—and its contingency" (*Gender Trouble* [New York: Routledge, 1990], p. 137). I would argue that we may extend Garber's argument here to include as homologous boundary that between the "real" and the "animated" character, or for that matter, between "animation" and "*in*animation" generally.
18. It might be interesting to consider here Wayne Koestenbaum's memory (as related in *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* [New

York: Poseidon Press, 1993]) of the role played by the strangely disembodied voice of Adriana Casselotti, as "Snow White," in the development of his own identity as an "opera queen" (see p. 12).

19. Amusingly enough, some of the dwarfs' dance, though largely dominated by a sort of pan-Germanic kitsch (including a certain amount of yodeling), has a slight Slavic aura to it as well. The dwarfs take turns with what in the Russian context would be called "chastushki" (witty rhyming lines), punctuated by the "Silly Song" refrain ("Ho Hum the tune is dumb, the words don't mean a thing / Isn't this a Silly Song for anyone to sing?"); then at one point in the doubled dwarfs' dance with Snow White, the feet (Sneezy's) start doing a little Russian kick step as the rest of the dwarfs shout "Hey! Hey!"
20. This is one place where scenario and film do not quite match. In the scenario the revelation of the real face behind the mask occurs in two dramatic stages: once to Ivan and "us," the watching audience, as Fyodor overhears the sharp words exchanged by his father and the Tsar (Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, Vol. 6, p. 347) and then finally to everybody at the end of the dance as he leaps on a bench and his fellow dancers strip off his costume (349). In the film, however, Fyodor plays a cat-and-mouse game with the mask instead of symbolically holding back until a final revelation.
21. Translation: "Guests have gone to the boyars' courtyards / Axes with the boyars are making gay. . . . / Holla, holla! / Speak, speak! / Speak and sentence 'em / Speak and sentence 'em! / With axes settle 'em! / Hoy, burn, burn, burn!" (Eng. screenplay, trans. Ivor Montagu and Herbert Marshall [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962], pp. 191–92). Note the echoing of the fire theme.
22. Eisenstein compares this blue blush to Disney's characters' exaggerated blushes; he mentions specifically the skunk in *Bambi*, but for the record we should also recall the blushing faces of several of the seven dwarfs, and in particular the character who is "all blush": Bashful. (See Eisenstein, *Le Mouvement de l'art*, trans. B. Epstein, M. Iampolski, N. Noussinova, A. Zouboff [Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1986], pp. 230-31.)
23. As this scene continues, what happens? Dopey sees Snow White, mistakes her for a monster, runs. The other dwarfs see Dopey running, mistake him for a monster because he's covered with pots and pans, and do their best to, well, "assassinate" him with blows intended for another. Fortunately for Dopey, a few blows on the head from a pickax are no big deal for a cartoon character.
24. The mother, seen briefly in flashback as she dies, poisoned by enemies, may be an unambiguous figure in white, but, then again, she does abandon (even if unwillingly) her small son to a world intent on dominating if not destroying him.
25. See *Nonindifferent Nature*, p. 362, for one moment where these related images all come together.
26. Russell Merritt, "Recharging *Alexander Nevsky*: Tracking the Eisenstein-Prokofiev War Horse," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Winter 1994-95), pp. 34–47.
27. Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964), in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Delta, 1966), pp. 275–92.
28. Ivan's identity—as well as the political meaning of the *Ivan* films—has been discussed with great energy since the 1940s (and since Stalin, dissatisfied with the portrayal of the character he and the Central Committee had commissioned as one of a series of the Soviet leader's historical forerunners, had criticized the Ivan of *Part II* as an indecisive Hamlet). A good summary of the arguments surrounding the figure of Ivan is provided in Barthélemy Amengual, *Que Viva Eisenstein!* (Paris: L'Age d'homme, 1980), pp. 347–94. A recent and interesting reading of *Ivan the Terrible* that stresses the congruences between "SME's merciless poetic machine" and "Ivan's vengeful cruelty" is provided by Alexander Zholkovsky in "The Terrible Armor-Clad General Line: A New Profile of Eisenstein's Poetics," *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, Sonderband 31 (1992), pp. 481–501. Zholkovsky is expanding here on Leonid Kozlov's famous suggestion that Ivan is partly modelled on the figure of Vsevolod Meyerhold, who had played Ivan on the stage at the end of the previous century. See Kozlov, "A Hypothetical Dedication," in Lars Kleberg and Haken Lövgren, eds., *Eisenstein Revisited: A Collection of Essays* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1987), pp. 65–92.



Reviews

Georgia

Director: Ulu Grosbard. Producers: Barbara Turner, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Grosbard. Cinematographer: Jan Kiesser. Music: Steven Soles. Miramax.

A banner year for fiction and nonfiction portraits of doomed and discontented female iconoclasts, 1996 featured Susanne Ofteringer's documentary of the Velvet Underground's morbid chanteuse and heroin addict, *Nico Icon*, Mark Rappaport's metabiography *From the Journals of Jean Seberg* and Ulu Grosbard's *Georgia*, a small revolution in its depiction of female excess, relationships, and unclassifiable, diffuse desires.

Written by Barbara Turner and starring her daughter, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Georgia subverts the notion that documentaries or biographies treat their subject matter more truthfully or authentically than fiction. Though Turner's script and Grosbard's film are works of fiction (albeit created after Turner's extensive interviews with performers on the Seattle music scene), it is Jennifer Jason Leigh's anguished performance of female anger, despair, and dissatisfaction which suggests that the medium of an actor's voice and body can convey deeper truths than films like *Nico Icon* and *From the Journals of Jean Seberg*, despite all their factual and critical insights. Leigh invests her character with a veracity, rage, and profundity that eclipse the desire of these other films to envision and portray actual women. Like a number of Leigh's films (*Last Exit to Brooklyn, Mrs Parker and the Vicious Circle, and Dolores Claiborne*), Georgia examines the behavior of a female character who is as subversive and wounded as archetypal male protagonists are angry and nonconformist.

The story of a rebellious, self-destructive, but sympathetic, oddly self-actualized woman, *Georgia*—despite its title—focuses on the fits and starts in the musical career of Sadie Flood (Leigh). While her sister Georgia (Mare Winningham) is a famous, respected nouveau folkie who croons Stephen Foster's "Hard Times" and other soulful anthems to a devout legion of fans, Sadie's repertoire features cover tunes from scruffy chroniclers of another generation's angst: the Velvet Underground, Elvis Costello, and Van Morrison. Performing in bowling alleys, at Jewish weddings, and in dingy alternative music bars, Sadie's life is defined by a ravenous ambition for inclusion in the comfort and respectability of Georgia's fame, a thirst for recognition which may have more to do with wanting her sister's love and acceptance than with the peripheral pleasures of money and stardom.

A punk waif with raccoon eyeliner, dressed in her sister's cast-off clothes and weighed down by stacks of bangles and necklaces that only accentuate her undernourished frame, Sadie lives in a demimonde of second-rate and cult musicians

Jennifer Jason Leigh (left) as Sadie and Mare Winningham as Georgia

growing inexorably older and reluctantly recognizing their own dwindling chances for success. In a creative milieu dominated by male songwriters and performers, she grapples for inclusion and authenticity by association.

A subtle and shrewd discourse on the sexism of the music industry, Georgia shows how female ambition is more acceptable when presented in the soothing, feminine, folksy vehicle of Georgia's harmonious, gentle music, but is threatening, embarrassing, and incomprehensible in Sadie's knife-edge performances. Georgia has not only achieved a certain stature as a performer, but her repressed, contained, maternal qualities seem to guarantee her inclusion in a world that cannot accommodate Sadie's mercurial temperament, her abrasiveness, and her peculiarity. While Georgia's performances in packed concert halls inspire a wellspring of pride and love on Sadie's face as she sits in the audience, Sadie's own unrestrained, emotionally revealing performances, devoid of the good taste and style which accompany Georgia's act, embarrass and repel Georgia, who seems to suggest how zealously women police and chastise other women's untoward behavior. While Leigh delivers a performance whose outward rage makes her character vivid and real, Mare Winningham has the often more difficult task of suppressing her feelings while still making us understand her displeasure with Sadie. In her cold placidity, her uneasiness with Sadie's excesses, Winningham succinctly makes comprehensible Sadie's rage and need for affection. Leigh and Winningham's performances are a refined, delicate interplay: Leigh constantly moving needily toward Winningham; Winningham repeatedly pulling away.

Ulu Grosbard's unaffected, contemplative style is as surreptitious and guarded as Winningham's low-key performance. Grosbard tends toward compact, often ambiguous scenes which, individually, can be obscure. Rather than cutting from establishing shots to tighter, expository ones, Grosbard often begins his scenes with the small, precise detail—the nuanced, fleeting, but incrementally significant moment—then moves on to another scene without pausing for clarification. This method is typified by a scene of Georgia's young son Andrew snuggling under his sister Mish's nightgown. In itself the moment is fairly opaque, but when compared with a subsequent scene, of Sadie performing in a rundown Portland bar, it articulates Sadie's separation from such domestic comfort, which helps to explain the rage and pain expressed in her music. Grosbard sets these small fragments of insight against other scenes that are extended to unusual lengths (e.g. Sadie's musical performances). This interweaving of the abbreviated and the hypnotically extended consequently suggests the fractured consciousness of the film's drugged and dreamy protagonist.

Besides its formal peculiarity, *Georgia* is atypical for privileging the tension-laden, difficult relationships between two women over any romantic storyline, and for lacking the closure normally provided in Hollywood films. Grosbard's film concerns not romantic blockage but miscommunication between women. The female voice, typically presented as an easy, liquid, natural medium between women, is here a door slammed shut between Georgia and Sadie, and a frustrating thematic blockage. The pain of this misunderstanding is intensified by the apparent gift of emotional expressiveness and candor Georgia freely gives to her audience, but which she withholds from her sister. Reduced to just another adoring audience member by her own flesh and blood, Sadie beats even more aggressively at Georgia's professional reserve, clamoring to be included in her sister's web of protection and comfort. A frustratingly brittle, frosty earth mother, Georgia has a singing voice whose dulcet calm and soothing grace suggest a siren song: a cruel, beguiling promise of comfort which in real life she cannot or will not give her sister. In many ways the seemingly genuine emotionalism of Georgia's music is, Grosbard suggests, just a refined act. With her AIDS benefits, natural foods, and crocheted skull caps, Georgia is, in the most deadening sense, "politically correct." While *Cineaste*'s Kent Jones has made a good case for *Georgia* as a statement against yuppie values ("a stinging reprimand to baby-boom complacency," treating a punk subculture "dissolved by the music business during the Reagan era, with its triumph of a yuppie consumer culture that embraced the kind of immaculate, 'quality' music that Georgia sings") Grosbard's film can be just as easily read as a pin pricked in the smug, self-congratulatory Clinton-era liberalism of people whose aesthetically correct lifestyle stands in for genuine humanity or compassion.

Ensconced in her cozy family farmhouse, surrounded by her attentive husband (Ted Levine) and children, Georgia's life exhibits the kind of cloistered, womb-like self-preservation some families have—a comfortable insulation from the harsh,

Distant sisters:
Leigh (left)
and Winningham
as Sadie and Georgia

difficult real world which Sadie inhabits. For this reason, Georgia's folksy ballads and angst of "hard times" ring hollow compared to the pragmatic hard times endured by her sister Sadie, who careens from job to job, and from man to man, caught up in diversionary tranquilizers of drugs and sex. The irony of Georgia's lyrics is that while they are, Turner's dialogue suggests, penned by the singer (with the exception of Georgia's signature song "Hard Times"), they lack the resonance and the horrible, tortured fire Sadie brings to her appropriated cover tunes of other artists' work.

While critics have interpreted Sadie's failure to achieve success as a confirmation of her lack of talent, this judgement fails to account for Leigh's delivery of a searing, disquieting poetry which suggests stakes larger than a prototypical *A Star Is Born* scenario. A true performance artist who changes the nature of words by virtue of her voice and inflection, Sadie recreates the words of Nico, Elvis Costello, and, in the emotional centerpiece of the drama, Van Morrison, investing them with an autobiographical flavor. The difference between Georgia and Sadie is best illustrated at the AIDS benefit, where Sadie's psychologically frank, pain-filled rendition of Morrison's "Take Me Back" repulses and mortifies her sister. The raw, open display of emotions is unpalatable and disturbing to Georgia in the context of a politically correct rally where packaged, tasteful emotionalism and contained, abstract sentiment are privileged over honest, personal displays. *Georgia* pillories a culture where emotional investment is made in causes, but not individual people, and where momentary, token displays of "caring" supplant long-term, intimate relationships.

Sadie's cover of Van Morrison's "Take Me Back" becomes a transcendent chant and elegy for the promise and security enjoyed by Georgia's children and suggested in a brief glimpse of Sadie as a child in the family farmhouse at the film's opening. Implicit in this piercing lament of incompleteness, of solitude and wounded nostalgia and the repeated mantra, "when everything felt," is Sadie's desire to return to the immediacy, the sensation of living her performances give voice to. Her interpretation of Morrison's words becomes a vision of her soul turned inside out—splayed and bloody and hurt. Speaking again and again the words of Morrison's song, she re-envisions them, revealing the original power of their meaning. The words, as Sadie sings them, are flayed, eviscerated, and loaded with meaning, while Georgia's socially conscious, explicitly "meaningful" songs are really empty, part of a poetically tortured act that cloaks the relatively peaceful character of her life.

A sublime marriage of Grosbard's talent for presenting lives free of pat, definitive characterizations, and Jennifer Jason Leigh's honest, gripping performance, Georgia is liberating and rare not only for making women's lives the emotional center of its drama, but for presenting a central character so anarchic, mercurial, and unpredictable that she questions the very notion of what constitutes typical female behavior.

■ Felicia Feaster is a freelance writer living in New York.

Affaires publiques (Public Affairs)

Director/writer/producer: Robert Bresson. Script: Bresson, André Josset, Paul Weill. Cinematographer: Nicolas Toporkoff. Composer: Jean Wiener.

Made in 1934, Bresson's 25-minute debut film was believed lost until 1987, when a print came to light in the Cinémathèque Française. It was shown last year at New York's Museum of Modern Art along with other discoveries and rarities from the Cinémathèque's archives. (The film has no American distributor.)

Bresson came fairly late to filmmaking. Born in 1907,[1] he studied classics and philosophy and became a painter before turning to the cinema. A British painter friend, Roland Penrose, lent Bresson the money to make *Public Affairs.*

Two members of Bresson's first creative team went on to collaborate on his feature films: Pierre Charbonnier was production designer on seven of them and Jean Wiener wrote the music for three. At first sight, however, *Public Affairs* has little else in common with Bresson's later films. Set in an imaginary country named Crogandie, it is a surreal satirical comedy—"un comique fou," as Bresson described it.

The chancellor of Crogandie (played deadpan by the then famous clown Béby) takes part in three public ceremonies (with Marcel Dalio—well known for his roles in *Grand Illusion, Rules of the Game,* and *To Have and Have Not*—playing a different part in each). When a statue of the chancellor is unveiled, its wide yawning mouth sends everyone in the country to sleep. At a fire fighters' demonstration, the building to be set on fire rolls offscreen and the chancellor's coattails smolder instead. At the launching of a liner, the champagne bottle refuses to break; when shot out of a gun it blasts through the metal plating and causes the ship to sink. Meanwhile the princess of neighboring Mirémie, in love with the chancellor, has piloted a plane to Crogandie, pursued on horseback by the king.

While that brief synopsis may evoke the Marx Brothers or *Million Dollar Legs, Public Affairs* has a tighter organization, with transitions eliminated almost completely. Within the constraints of a short film, Bresson manages to present a remarkable variety of incident—what might be called a precise clarity of confusion. Here one can see the beginnings of the clipped style that would predominate in his mature work, even in the increasingly complex personal relationships of the later films, from *Balthazar* through *L'Argent.* And here, too, Bresson already shows the detachment, the refusal to cue emotion, that he would maintain in his serious films, most rigorously in *Pickpocket* and *The Trial of Joan of Arc.*

It may be little more than a coincidence that Bresson chose a genre that requires no expressive acting. "Since I considered that only the action was important," he said, "it was simply a matter of having [Béby, Marcel Dalio, et al.] perform it." [2] Coincidence or not, this approach certainly prefigures his later exfoliation of expressiveness from his players—or, as he preferred to call them, *modèles.*

As a zany comedy, *Public Affairs* interrupts its "story" with surprising bursts of action. Before the statue is unveiled, a circle of "high school girls," having demurely sung the Crogandian anthem, swirl into a chorus line and kick their legs out of slit skirts in a jazzy dance routine. (They were in fact from the Folies Bergère.) In a rapid one-two-three-four, the chancellor is presented with a bouquet, it's crushed in his embrace of the presenter, he tosses it aside, and it's swept into a street cleaner's pan. And when the cord is pulled for the unveiling, the cloth whooshes into the statue's open mouth.

Similar though less zany interruptions recur throughout Bresson's work—like the unexpected joy of the priest being taken for a motorbike ride in *Diary of a Country Priest* or the Afro-Brazilian music from the bateau-mouche in *Four Nights of a Dreamer.* And the bouquet sequence of *Public Affairs* is transformed into the reverberating effect that people can have on one another for good or evil: the pickpocket team passing the loot from one to another in *Pickpocket*; Mouchette being paid for her café work, immediately giving the money to her father, and being given a drink in return; and the passing of the counterfeit bill from boy to store clerk to Yvon to café owner in *L'Argent.*

Those comparisons may seem superficial, the kind that can too easily be found between films that are fundamentally dissimilar. The point, however, is not that *Public Affairs* contains the seed of Bresson's later moral concerns but that it reveals more than the seed of his later style—a style that

proved as viable for high seriousness as it did for *comique fou.*

The strongest connection between *Public Affairs* and Bresson's later work is the complete assurance with which it is made. This is no tentative prentice work. "As I see it," said Bresson, "any errors one may commit in mise-en-scène arise from lack of foresight. Thus, before starting to shoot my film I made sure of knowing *Public Affairs* by heart. I hardly used a studio at all. I was quite content to look for outdoor settings, and I found them easily because all I needed was a wall, a tree and the sky. In other words, it wasn't a question of making an 'artistic' film but of having the poetry emerge from a particular continuity of invention."[3]

In *Public Affairs* as in his mature films, Bresson relies on the simplest of technical means. Apart from some doctoring of the sinking liner, there are no visible trick shots, including slow or speeded motion. The use of sound, too, is simple and effective—as in the silence that takes over when everyone falls asleep. The film opens inside the Crogandian radio station with an announcer in the foreground and a soprano singing but unheard behind a soundproof studio window. The film ends as the chancellor's chauffeur lays waste to the studio, finally smashing the window so that the soprano's voice bursts forth.

Bresson's own voice bursts forth in *Public Affairs*—saying something different from what we've come to expect, yet just as compelling. This is a wonderfully enjoyable film in its own right.

■ William Johnson is the New York Editor of *Film Quarterly.*

Notes

1. Some sources give Bresson's birth year as 1901 or 1909, but most give 1907.
2. From an article by Paul Gilson in *Pour Vous*, quoted in Philippe Arnaud, *Robert Bresson*, Cahiers du Cinéma Collection "Auteurs" (Paris, 1986).
3. Ibid.

Letter to the Editor

I'm writing in response to your article (*FQ* vol. 50, no. 2) on the Australian film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, reviewed by Susan Barber (a former classmate of mine from the University of Southern California). I agree wholeheartedly with Susan's conclusion: the film degrades its few prominent female characters, including Cynthia, the "oversexed" Filipina wife. However, the review overlooked an added dimension that supports Susan's interpretation of the film.

The review refers to Cynthia as a "stripper," linking her to both the "damned whores" of 18th-century Australia and the perceived threat of recent Asian immigration Down Under. Unlike the typical stripper, however, Cynthia doesn't remove her clothes. Instead, she "spits" some ping-pong balls from her vagina in front of a crowd of men—a moment that's played for laughs. Rather than harkening back to the Western tradition of burlesque, Cynthia's gynecological acrobatics are emblematic of those featured in the nightclub shows of the Asian sex industry.

The brothel trade of underdeveloped Asian countries, especially Thailand and the Philippines, often feature nightclub shows of women performing unusual feats with their vaginas (such as mashing bananas or inserting razor blades). The purpose of these "beaver shows" is to arouse the viewers and encourage them to patronize the local prostitutes, including the performers themselves. And the audiences for these shows are primarily white men from Australia and New Zealand.

To be sure, men from North America and Western Europe also make up a sizeable portion of Asia's sex consumers, but Australasian men have greater geographical access to the Asian sex trade. Moreover, Australia's attraction to Asian prostitution has already been acknowledged in such documentaries as *The Good Woman of Bangkok*. So, the character of Cynthia is already coded in terms of a specific Asian sexual stereotype that is popularized in the (white, male) Australian imagination.

Worse, *Priscilla* portrays Cynthia's desire to perform her sex show in front of men as an uncontrollable urge (she has to be restrained from performing, and the ping-pong balls must be kept away from her under lock and key). The message is clear: Asian women have a natural predisposition for sexual exhibitionism. This portrayal is extremely disturbing because so many Thai and Filipina women are forced into the sex industry by poverty and a lack of social options.

If Asian women are seen as inherently drawn to public displays of sexual prowess, this lets the forces behind the Asian sex industry—and the Western men who patronize it—off the hook. *Priscilla* takes a very serious, very misunderstood political issue and turns it into a glib joke, with the Asian women as a figure of ridicule.

In showing the triumphant perseverance of three drag queens in the face of a homophobic society, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* affirms the joyful endurance of a gay identity to an audience that isn't exclusively homosexual. But the film also affirms another, more subtle message: because Asian women are innate exhibitionists, the sexual exploitation of Asian women by Australian men is still acceptable. As Susan's article suggests, the cinematic liberation of one oppressed group shouldn't come at the expense of another.

Robert M. Payne, Studio City, Calif.

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EDITED BY DUDLEY ANDREW

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The Architecture of Vision

Writings and Interviews on Cinema

By Michelangelo Antonioni. Edited by Carlo di Carlo and Giorgio Tinazzi, American edition by Marga Cottino-Jones. New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1996. $36.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

This is a translation of Antonioni's *Fare un film per me è vivere* (*Making Films Is My Life*), published by Marsilio (Venice, 1995), itself culled from *Michelangelo Antonioni Ecrits 1936/1985* (ed. Giorgio Tinazzi), which is volume 4 of *L'oeuvre de Michelangelo Antonioni*, a sumptuous collection of writings by and about Antonioni, edited by Carlo di Carlo and published by Cinecitta International. It is a part of the Antonioni Project, which has also organized exhibitions and public seminars on the director and is building a permanent museum of Antonioniana in his home town of Ferrara.

Antonioni was an active cinema critic in the 30s and 40s, but stopped writing about other directors' work after making his own first film, *Story of a Love Affair* (1950). From then until his debilitating stroke in 1985, he wrote a number of short pieces and gave many interviews; two particularly, at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematographia, are of such importance and influence that the editors call them "oral writings" and include them among the essays of the first section of this book, "My Cinema." Section 2 contains writings by Antonioni on several of his own films (from *Attempted Suicide* [1953] to *The Mystery of Oberwald* [1980]). Section 3 reprints other interviews of a general nature, and 4, interviews on specific films, from *Story of a Love Affair* (1950) to *Identification of a Woman* (1982). Many of these pieces have already appeared in English, but they lie scattered among a variety of journals, and it is useful to have them assembled in one volume. Perhaps inevitably, such assemblage leads to some repetitiousness. But that is as much the interviewers' problem as Antonioni's, since they tended to ask similar questions, Antonioni, being consequent and clear about his art, tended to provide similar answers.

Antonioni vowed from the beginning to eschew standard film-making practices. His first feature film employed extremely long takes and *temps mort* holds on characters to glean the "true" reality in the actor's face and body *after* she thought the shot was finished. Antonioni developed the long take on his own—it just seemed right for *Cronaca* (he says that he did not see *The Magnificent Ambersons* until much later). But he did not feel bound to the long take forever: "Later . . . I became aware that perhaps it was not the best method after all, that perhaps I was concentrating too much on the external aspects of the actors' states of mind and not enough on the states of mind themselves." In *Red Desert*, he used many short takes: "Perhaps it was the fact that I was using color that suggested this technique to me, this deep-seated need to deal with [colors] in large blotches, as if they were pulsations that penetrate chaotically inside the characters." Similarly, he explains his use of the telephoto lens in *Red Desert* to "limit the depth of

field . . . to put the characters in contact with things" (one remembers how Giuliana needs to cling to walls). It's too bad that Antonioni cites only a few such concrete examples of how and why he chose specific techniques on the set. Mostly, he speaks in generalities about his need to trust intuition. In his desire to "fill the image with a greater suggestiveness," Antonioni dispensed with some standard Hollywood shooting and editing conventions. For instance, he permitted himself certain "errors" in shot/countershot editing (presumably crossing the 180-degree line). His constant desire was to get rid of "unnecessary technical baggage."

His direction of actors, too, was unorthodox and was criticized as such. In several of these writings he defends his practice against accusations of mistreating them. He explains how he had to give opaque directions to Massimo Girotti (the protagonist in *Story of a Love Affair*) to keep him from overacting, to slap Lucia Bosè to get more expression into that lovely face, and to "deceive" Betsy Blair and Steve Cochrane to get compelling performances in *Il Grido*. This deception obviously pained him—he is far too gentle for sadism—but he found it essential. Only the director, he argues, can decide how characters should look, move, and speak; an actor need not understand her role, she need only feel it. Explaining the character to her is not the way to achieve that result. Antonioni sees the actor as only one element in the ensemble of features that have to be organized. Like an orchestra conductor, only the director can blend the heterogeneous elements into a unified and meaningful whole. Not being an actor himself, Antonioni could not in any case show actors how to perform their roles. His resort to "deception" is clearly not a question of ego but of simply doing his art as he saw it. What Antonioni *doesn't* say, however, is that his method really only works with great actors—Monica Vitti, Jeanne Moreau, Mastroianni, Delon, Hemmings, Redgrave, and Nicholson—actors able to respond intuitively to the signals that he did give. Unlike De Sica, he could not get accomplished performances from amateurs like Daria Halperin and Mark Frechette. Great actors have a sixth sense that thrives even under reticent direction.

Antonioni says relatively little about his use of the sound track. He prefers recording on the set to postproduction dubbing because what is "picked up by microphones [has] a power of suggestion that can't be obtained with dubbing." As for commentative music, in the late 50s he began to cultivate a "dry manner" (climaxing in stark electronic sounds in *Red Desert*). His decision was simply that music provided unwanted "outside commentary"; it was "old-fashioned and rancid" and tended simply to "duplicate" the action. Music, he felt, belonged on phonograph disks, where it could have its own autonomy. Up to 1966 he increasingly insisted on "let[ting] silence have its place." (Later, however, he was to reincorporate music, especially of a pop sort. This often worked better if the source was diegetic—on-screen or within earshot; the technique obviously sounded less artificial to him than nondiegetic off-screen music.)

Antonioni dwells more on his creative state of mind than on how he cultivated his style. He repeatedly describes his need to arrive alone on the set "in a virginal state," to absorb and choose visual nuances from what lies before his gaze. His need for freedom was so great that he preferred to work in sunless locations, since "in the sun, the camera's angles are fixed." This intense quest for spontaneous inspiration from visual cues—"an idea almost always comes to me through images"—lies at the opposite pole from a storyboard director like Hitchcock. It also reveals the profound degree to which Antonioni trusts his visual instinct. Visuals are also at the core of his narrative invention, the very way he discovers stories (his most recent film, *Beyond the Clouds* (1995) is about a director who wanders about, picking up stories from what he sees around him). This was his method from the very beginning: chancing on a drowned man on the beach on his way to Paris for his first feature-film job with Marcel Carné, he saw a black bathing-attendant in a white singlet; a girl in a flesh-colored bathing suit; a ten-year-old boy pointing the body out to an eight-year-old girl and asking if she was scared; the police clearing the beach; the bath-attendant leaving to give a lady with violet hair "her usual lesson of gymnastics." End of story. But, remarks Antonioni, his movie version of this experience, if he had made one, would "remove the actual event from the scene, and leave only the image"—the white sky, the deserted sea front, the sea cold and empty, the hotels white and half-shuttered. For "the event here adds nothing: it is superfluous. . . . The dead man acted as a distraction to a state of tension. But the true emptiness, the malaise, the anxiety, the nausea, the atrophy of all normal feelings and desires, the fear, the anger—all these I felt when, coming out of the Negresco, I found myself in that whiteness, in that nothingness, which took shape around a black point." Many of the sketches of Antonioni's book *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber* (ed. and trans. William Arrowsmith [New York: Oxford, 1986]) have exactly this sketchy, allusive, and highly visual character. And so do the four short films that constitute *Beyond the Clouds*. Antonioni explicitly defends the right of the director—like that of the

postmodern novelist—to present stories "with neither a beginning nor an end . . . without lacy scenes, without a dramatic arc, without catharsis. They can be made up of tatters, of fragments, as unbalanced as the lives we lead."

Antonioni has always freely discussed the thematics of his films. He learned at the 1959 Cannes Festival, when *L'avventura* met with initial hostility, that he would have to educate the public about his films' intentions. He has done so in a clear and articulate way, as the eminent European intellectual that he is. (His erudition is astonishing: these pieces contain a wide range of casual but informative allusion to writers from Adorno to Virginia Woolf, Wittgenstein to Joan Didion.) He refused to simplify his message, disagreeing, for instance, that the final shot of *L'avventura* is either pessimistic or optimistic and arguing for a more complex interpretation.

When asked what his work brought him, he deprecated the question: "It gives me everything. It gives me the chance to express myself, to communicate with others. Being inept at speaking, I would have the sensation of not existing at all—without the cinema." His later career, especially his astonishing production of *Beyond the Clouds* at the age of 83, testifies to the depth of that need and his stamina in satisfying it. It is touching to learn the price he paid for staying true to his own vision. After the success of *Blow-Up*, an American producer called him into his office, where, seated between Mia Farrow and an artistic director, he offered to write Antonioni a check for $1,300,000 to direct *Peter Pan*. He asks his interviewer wryly, "Can you see me doing *Peter Pan*?"

But Antonioni protests too much about the "ineptness" of his speech. This book illustrates that, until his stroke, he spoke and wrote copiously and well. Indeed, few of his peers can match his verbal articulateness. Nor, as *Beyond the Clouds* and recent paintings and drawings show, can he be imagined to cease expressing himself—one way or another—as long as he lives.

SEYMOUR CHATMAN

■ Seymour Chatman is Professor of Rhetoric and Film at the University of California at Berkeley; his last book was *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film.*

Attack of the Leading Ladies

Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema

By Rhona J. Berenstein. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. $42.50 cloth; $17.50 paper.

Horror films have been of interest and significance to feminist critics since the mid-1980s, when a series of articles appeared that problematized the prevailing theories of spectatorship based on psychoanalytic models. A number of critics, including Linda Williams, Tania Modleski, Barbara Creed, and Carol Clover, have in various ways used readings of horror films to challenge these theories for both their implicit heterosexism and their understanding of sadism and masochism.

Rhona J. Berenstein, one of the most recent contributors to this discussion of gender and sexuality in the horror film, offers *Attack of the Leading Ladies* as a theoretical and historical inquiry into issues of spectatorship. While not offering a comprehensive philosophy of horror in general, or a complete narrative history of horror films in particular, Berenstein here examines four popular assumptions about representations of gender within horror films. First, she challenges the assumption that the historical audience of classic horror was predominately male, and that the infrequent female viewer cowered in fear. Second, she problematizes the assertion that classic horror narratives center around (monstrous) heterosexual desire. Third, she challenges the argument that horror constructs an ideal viewer who is not only male, but also sadistic. And fourth, she critiques the assumption that, at the textual level, the sadism of the male viewer both depends on and is given expression through the terror and suffering of passive female heroines (2).

Berenstein limits her project to horror films made between 1931 and 1936, a move she explains with the fact that high-budget horror production came to a halt at the end of this period (15). Her definition of the genre is somewhat more expansive than that of other critics of classic horror: it includes not only hypnosis films (vampires, zombies, and mummies) and mad-doctor movies, but also jungle-horror films. Berenstein acknowledges that the inclusion of this third category may seem strange, but that marketing practices in the 1930s grouped the three types of films together, labeling them all "horror." Her analysis, then, is not concerned either with explaining horror's heyday in the early 1930s or with constructing a coherent definition

postmodern novelist—to present stories "with neither a beginning nor an end . . . without lacy scenes, without a dramatic arc, without catharsis. They can be made up of tatters, of fragments, as unbalanced as the lives we lead."

Antonioni has always freely discussed the thematics of his films. He learned at the 1959 Cannes Festival, when *L'avventura* met with initial hostility, that he would have to educate the public about his films' intentions. He has done so in a clear and articulate way, as the eminent European intellectual that he is. (His erudition is astonishing: these pieces contain a wide range of casual but informative allusion to writers from Adorno to Virginia Woolf, Wittgenstein to Joan Didion.) He refused to simplify his message, disagreeing, for instance, that the final shot of *L'avventura* is either pessimistic or optimistic and arguing for a more complex interpretation.

When asked what his work brought him, he deprecated the question: "It gives me everything. It gives me the chance to express myself, to communicate with others. Being inept at speaking, I would have the sensation of not existing at all—without the cinema." His later career, especially his astonishing production of *Beyond the Clouds* at the age of 83, testifies to the depth of that need and his stamina in satisfying it. It is touching to learn the price he paid for staying true to his own vision. After the success of *Blow-Up*, an American producer called him into his office, where, seated between Mia Farrow and an artistic director, he offered to write Antonioni a check for $1,300,000 to direct *Peter Pan*. He asks his interviewer wryly, "Can you see me doing *Peter Pan*?"

But Antonioni protests too much about the "ineptness" of his speech. This book illustrates that, until his stroke, he spoke and wrote copiously and well. Indeed, few of his peers can match his verbal articulateness. Nor, as *Beyond the Clouds* and recent paintings and drawings show, can he be imagined to cease expressing himself—one way or another—as long as he lives.

SEYMOUR CHATMAN

■ Seymour Chatman is Professor of Rhetoric and Film at the University of California at Berkeley; his last book was *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film.*

Attack of the Leading Ladies

Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema

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Horror films have been of interest and significance to feminist critics since the mid-1980s, when a series of articles appeared that problematized the prevailing theories of spectatorship based on psychoanalytic models. A number of critics, including Linda Williams, Tania Modleski, Barbara Creed, and Carol Clover, have in various ways used readings of horror films to challenge these theories for both their implicit heterosexism and their understanding of sadism and masochism.

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of the genre, but rather with conducting a textual reading of films included in this historic commercial category; publicity campaigns of these films; censorship files from the M.P.P.D.A.; and movie reviews.

The strength of Berenstein's analysis lies in her careful and copious archival work, which achieves a level of detail often lacking in other discussions of spectatorship. She is at her best when discussing the marketing strategies and movie reviews against which these films can be read. This allows her convincingly to support her first contention: that the historic audience of classic horror was not exclusively male, nor was female fear necessarily the "natural" reaction to these films. Berenstein proposes that the female scream as privileged signifier of horror was itself recognized by audiences, reviewers, and promoters as excessive, perhaps even parodic, a fact that problematizes the conception of a natural, passive femininity assumed by other theorists of horror (60). In chapter 3, "Horror for Sale," Berenstein demonstrates through an analysis of reviews and press-book releases that classic horror presented an opportunity for the enactment of gender (to some degree, self-consciously so) by the film audience; women could cower on the shoulders of their dates, averting their eyes, while men bravely refused to look away (60). Thus she concludes that gender is an effect of performance rather than a stable category for identity, and that horror films mobilize this performance of gender.

Berenstein's readings of individual films at the narrative level within a historical context are also insightful, in particular her analyses of *Dracula's Daughter*, *Dr. X*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, and *King Kong*. These readings are effective because of the breadth of historical research and her attention to textual detail in the examination of individual films. For instance, in her discussion of *King Kong*, Berenstein utilizes a variety of resources to argue that, in doubling Wray and Kong, *King Kong* aligns femininity with monstrosity. Berenstein points out that such a construction contradicts the division of sexual labor in horror films presumed by such critics as Dennis White ("The Poetics of Horror," 1971) and James Twitchell (*Dreadful Pleasures,* 1985), in which women occupy the position of pure, passive victim and monstrosity is configured as active and male (183–93).

Berenstein finds such horror criticism problematic because of its heterosexism. Specifically, she indicates that existing models of spectatorship that are based solely on a traditional Freudian model of subjectivity are insufficient because they are built on familiar binaries (male/female, heterosexual/homosexual); emphasize identification over desire; are based solely on sexual rather than social categories; or relegate female viewers to a masochistic viewing position (44–47). Further, she claims that feminist theorists who attempt revisions of Mulvey based on a pre-Oedipal model of bisexuality also participate in a heterosexist, binary logic. Implicit in this critique, then, is the desire to free up a spectatorial position for marginalized viewers outside the heterosexual paradigm, a position that does not imply transvestism, regressive lesbianism, or masochistic spectatorship.

With this goal in mind, Berenstein proposes a model of spectatorship based on the concept of drag/masquerade. Drawing first on Judith Butler, Berenstein asserts that a model of gender that emphasizes its performative aspect is useful in terms of spectatorship because such a model does not lock viewers into rigid spectatorial positions; viewers may enact an appropriately gendered behavior while watching a film (women may scream at the sight of the monster). With this model, spectators are allowed a "simultaneity of multiple identifications and desires . . . accommodat[ing] an interplay between difference and similarity" (58). In other words, spectatorship-as-drag, unlike the viewing paradigms Berenstein critiques, does not require that spectators identify *only* with their cinematic counterparts on screen, but allows spectators to identify against themselves as well (with the monster or with a character of the opposite gender) (47).

Berenstein also draws on Joan Riviere's theory of female masquerade to argue that, within the horror film, terror is equated with both femininity and performance. Female terror, then, serves to remind the viewer that *all* displays of gender are performative (9). In Riviere's case study, a female analysand exhibits excessive displays of femininity in order to disguise her threat to heterosexual manliness. For Berenstein, however, drag exceeds Riviere's discussion of masquerade in that it is not limited to women who put on femininity in order to diffuse the threat they pose to patriarchy. Indeed, drag/masquerade can be the "manliness" (refusal to look away from a horrible scene) that heterosexual men don in order to deny their identification with femininity, or the disguising of lesbian desire behind a mask of femininity (looking away or screaming) (53–56). Male bravery and female terror, then, have less to do with the actual emotional response of spectators than with the enactment of traditional gender roles (55).

Despite Berenstein's contention that she does not want to "level the playing field of spectatorship," however, her discussion of spectatorship-as-drag seems to accomplish precisely this reduction (58). The breadth of her concept of spectatorial drag diminishes its value as a category for understanding the activity of spectatorship. The lesbian spectator (or the

straight woman, for that matter) who "puts on" femininity in order to assuage male anxiety is performing a qualitatively different (and probably much more self-reflexive) act than the male viewer who disavows his femininity or homosexuality through excessively masculine behavior. To group both of them under the aegis of gender performance elides the ways in which the preservation of masculine heterosexuality is the unspoken concern of both masquerades.

Berenstein's discussion of the relationship between spectatorial identification and character action on-screen is flawed in much the same way. At times, in her analysis of individual texts, she claims that character and spectator action mirror one another; at other times, she argues that they do not. Berenstein's reading of the on-screen suffering of female and male characters is likewise inconsistent. Female suffering/screaming on-screen is evidence of a performance of gender, while male suffering on-screen and just outside the frame is simply male suffering (89–92).

Similar inconsistencies mar Berenstein's arguments about spectatorial desire. While she reads the refusal of male spectators to reveal their terror/horror at horror movies in general as a cover for homosexual desire (53), the screams of female spectators function as a cover for sadistic pleasure at the spectacle of male suffering in mad-doctor movies (89 and 123). With little more than a quote from Bela Lugosi to back up this claim, Berenstein contends that the popular model of male spectatorial sadism should be inverted; it is actually female spectators who take pleasure in the suffering of male characters despite the fact that female characters are still the most spectacular victims in horror films.

This critique is not meant to diminish the value of *Attack of the Leading Ladies*. Berenstein presents a particularly meaningful analysis of historic material, and her archival work is the most thorough project on classic horror I have seen to date. Indeed, archival work such as hers offers a valuable corrective to much film criticism, and other critics and theorists would do well to follow her model in providing thorough and interesting discussions of the ways in which textual meaning circulates within a larger economy of cultural signification. Readers interested in a useful historic analysis of classic horror need look no further than this book, although readers in search of a cogent model of spectatorship will need to look elsewhere.

K. E. SULLIVAN

■ K. E. Sullivan is writing a dissertation on horror film and literature in the English Department at the University of Oregon.

The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy

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Flipping through this book, you find three introductions, pebbly video stills sans captions, a chapter with topics ordered alphabetically, a game of Exquisite Corpse Q & A ("What is Polly's kiss? A gesture, sweet and minute"), and strings of such sentences as this: "The actress (Ann Rutherford) and the character (Polly) anticipating the age to come: *rutherford* ('a unit of radiation'), *poly* ('a polymorpho-nuclear leukocyte')." One might just end the review here. Those eager to enter another theme park for the literati may be enticed by *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy*. If you find the ludic ludicrous, this is not for you.

But stopping at first impressions would be rash, for the book aims to make an argument. I believe it runs this way. In the 19th century, modernity (the city, capitalism, etc.) triggered a "crisis of legibility" in which ordinary life became opaque. This crisis occurred within several domains of culture: the detective story, the *physiologies* of character types, and above all photography. The photograph is a fragment, a trace of that stubbornly material existence which cannot be reduced to abstract schemes, particularly schemes of language. Cinema constitutes both a development out of photography and the effort to harness its disruptive power (by means of narrative, which is coextensive with language).

But according to this book, one avant-garde tradition unleashes the power of the image. This line of thought is emblematized by the Parisian Surrealists' celebration of free association around the fragment. It is continued by Roland Barthes' notion of the "third meaning" and Derrida's grammatology. Film studies has neglected this antitraditional tradition, but by returning to it we can rejuvenate an academic discipline that has become mired in stale, repetitive readings. We should cultivate new modes of attending to images; we ought to model film research on *Nadja* and *Flaubert's Parrot*. The more unpredictable our critical writing, the more exciting and informative it will become. And the author insists that this sort of criticism creates more than a buzz. It yields knowledge. In fact, the surprise produced by experimental criticism produces information in the Shannon-Weaver sense of unexpected novelty.

For these reasons, we are expected to avoid taking *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* as only another transitory product of tenured hijinks in the seminar

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For these reasons, we are expected to avoid taking *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* as only another transitory product of tenured hijinks in the seminar

room. Yet where knowledge is at stake, claims should submit to critical questioning. If my summary of the book's tacit argument is even roughly right, a lot of questions might be posed. Here is one: How is the argument supported?

Partly by examples chosen from a few Hollywood films, mostly from the Andy Hardy series. Shots and scenes are plucked out, linked to others or to quotes from favored theorists, meditated upon along Rutherfordian/polyleukocyte lines. Here's another sample: Censor Joseph Breen's name is "one letter away from signifying the sexual act most actively suppressed: breed" (187). The author also supplies autobiographical reminiscences (e.g., a conference session at which an avant-garde mode of lecturing was greeted with silence), gratified reports of how his book's title bewildered his colleagues, classroom exercises in free association that have proven successful at the University of Florida, and substantial excerpts from exemplary student papers.

The book's argumentative drift also appeals to authorities. For a book seeking to point the way to an avant-garde criticism of the future, the landmarks look distinctly familiar: Paris/Berlin 1920s (Breton, Brecht, Benjamin); Paris 1966–1970 (Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Godard, Brecht again, above all Barthes); United States 1966–1970 (computers, Shannon-Weaver information theory, Walter Ong, and McLuhan). Much of the book consists of quotation and paraphrase of such thinkers, and each idea enunciated is taken to be self-sustaining, needing no evidence or argument. This indicates the book's obedience to contemporary academic norms of "top-down" theorizing, where the argument moves by hopscotching among citations.

It also moves by appeal to a rather startling analogy. The new film studies, we are told, will be like science. It is a "method" guided by "research questions," and its exercises are "experiments" that test "hypotheses." The models for this science are, surprisingly, Surrealist writing and Derridean grammatology, both of which have been purportedly "confirmed" by evidence. Yet real science—the sort that cures diseases and jets academics to conferences—depends on hypotheses that can be *dis*confirmed. "What is Polly's kiss?" is not a compelling scientific research question because no answer can be wrong. Where there is no possibility of error, there is no chance of knowledge. Similarly, science strives to be noncontradictory in its findings. The discoveries of biology or astronomy ought not to countermand laws of chemistry or physics. How *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* can reconcile, say, Shannon's fundamental theses about information engineering with Derridean grammatology, Surrealist automatic writing, and Benjaminian materialism remains obscure.

In pursuing the analogy to science, the book displays some confusion about what constitutes a "method." The steps taken in conducting a scientific experiment are publicly available and replicable by disinterested parties. To offer various free-association games as new "methods" is to conflate scientific method with any procedure that can be spelled out as a series of steps. Instructions for casting spells on your enemies can be listed procedurally, but they do not constitute an experimental method. Moreover, scientific activity involves both discovery and justification. Important discoveries have been made by serendipitous insights, but they were proved to be reliable only by being subjected to rigorous, intersubjectively plausible interrogation. You can build a reading of *The Maltese Falcon* by consulting a Ouija board, but that does not justify the case to a skeptical reader. You will still have to appeal to the protocols of reasonable inference and argument.

Above all, science as a form of rational inquiry demands that members of the community criticize one another. This does many useful things, including weeding out wacko theories. (Admittedly, many contemporary humanists do not want to weed out wacko theories.) By contrast, this book offers no criticism of the theorists it cites; vague and equivocal ideas such as "inner speech" and "simulation" are never probed. The same goes for the results achieved; you can't criticize a critic's divinations of rutherfords and breens. No surprise, then, that the text does not analyze its own enabling assumptions. Why assume that all films are photographic? Why believe that by adopting narrative form, cinema is committed to "language" in any sense? Why presuppose that the whole of film studies reduces to ways of reading movies? (There is, for example, historical research, not to mention empirical analyses of audiences, some of which constitute *real* experiments.) Similarly, there are reasonably plausible accounts of attention which would explain why we might scrutinize and imaginatively elaborate a still image, but the book entertains none of them.

At one point the book suggests that its use of science is just a literary conceit. The model is pataphysics, "a science of exceptions." But then what sort of knowledge can this generate? Purportedly not the sort valued in our "positivist culture" (99). (Interestingly, about half of adult Americans do not believe that the earth travels around the sun, and three-quarters think that dinosaurs were roaming the earth when the first humans appeared. Positivist culture has been a flop.) The question of what kind of knowledge can

be created by this method is made murkier by the book's constant equating of knowledge with novelty. According to *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy*, the most radical surprise will yield the most "information" in an engineering sense. But information in this sense is not identical to knowledge—that is, justified, true (or reliable) belief. In information-theoretic terms, unexpected lies are just as "informative" as unexpected truths.

What links the arguments by example, authority, and analogy are, it should now be evident, some standard strategies of reasoning and rhetoric. Again, *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* shows itself to be farther from the vanguard than it might hope. The commentary on theorists is, as is common today, governed by associative links forged among *aperçus* rather than by inferences from evidence to conclusion. As for the book's rhetoric, it has a familiar ring. We are promised a method that fights stuffy tradition. The enemy is the very academy that nurtures the innovative enterprise. The method promises not only pleasure but also political and cultural resistance. Above all, novelty is the only value, more important than truth or plausibility.

Again, none of these claims is defended in detail, and I suspect few would stand up to scrutiny. It all adds up to a surprisingly orthodox line for a project that would reinvent film studies. Ironically, the traditions that this book condemns as mundane once claimed exactly the same cutting-edge goals and values. Perhaps any professedly avant-garde criticism ought to consider the possibility that "progressive" art and its associated commentary have, over a century, built up their own clichés. Anybody trying to make the academy more avant-garde might reflect upon the academicism of the avant-garde itself.

DAVID BORDWELL

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Charlie Chaplin
Intimate Close-Ups

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Opposite Attraction
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Although new publications on Chaplin have appeared almost continuously since 1915, the quantity and quality of books on the artist have increased noticeably in the last 15 years. Some of these books were produced to mark the centennial of Chaplin's birth in 1989, but a major reappraisal of Chaplin and his work was already underway in the early 1980s, initiated by Kevin Brownlow and David Gill's BBC documentary *Unknown Chaplin* (1983), and by David Robinson's formidable *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985). Hale's and Milton's books contribute, numerically at least, to this new wave of books on Chaplin, while Gilbert's *Opposite Attraction* touches on Chaplin indirectly.

Gilbert's principal subjects are Paulette Goddard and her fourth and last husband, Erich Maria Remarque, but since Goddard was Chaplin's third wife, costarring with him in *Modern Times* and *The Great Dictator*, any comprehensive discussion of Goddard will necessarily involve Chaplin. Unlike Chaplin's second wife Lita Grey, who entered a forced marriage with him in her late teens, divorced him acrimoniously two years later, and published a ghosted tell-all potboiler in 1966, Goddard was at least 21 when she met Chaplin, previously married, financially independent, and exceptionally shrewd. She lived with Chaplin for approximately eight years and remained on cordial terms with him. Unfortunately for Chaplin scholars, however, she never felt compelled to write her memoirs.

But Goddard did reminisce about Chaplin, and these recollections, preserved in the Paulette Goddard Collection at New York University, help to fill a major gap in our knowledge of Chaplin's personal life.

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Gilbert's principal subjects are Paulette Goddard and her fourth and last husband, Erich Maria Remarque, but since Goddard was Chaplin's third wife, costarring with him in *Modern Times* and *The Great Dictator*, any comprehensive discussion of Goddard will necessarily involve Chaplin. Unlike Chaplin's second wife Lita Grey, who entered a forced marriage with him in her late teens, divorced him acrimoniously two years later, and published a ghosted tell-all potboiler in 1966, Goddard was at least 21 when she met Chaplin, previously married, financially independent, and exceptionally shrewd. She lived with Chaplin for approximately eight years and remained on cordial terms with him. Unfortunately for Chaplin scholars, however, she never felt compelled to write her memoirs.

But Goddard did reminisce about Chaplin, and these recollections, preserved in the Paulette Goddard Collection at New York University, help to fill a major gap in our knowledge of Chaplin's personal life.

Gilbert mines Goddard's reminiscences effectively, combining them with several other sources to produce a balanced and judicious account of Goddard's life with Chaplin. Not surprisingly, she reports that Chaplin wanted to control his relationships with women, and that Goddard partly resented his attempts to micromanage her career. Nevertheless, Goddard felt she had benefited greatly from his advice and direction, and was merely amused when she recalled that he threw a bucket of water on her (and her designer dress) to demonstrate the natural look he wanted for the gamine in *Modern Times*. In retrospect, Goddard evidently concluded that this temporary sacrifice of glamour was worthwhile, since she considered *Modern Times* her best film. Although she blamed Chaplin for her loss of the part of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, she nevertheless wielded considerable power in their relationship, maintained her autonomy to a great degree, and never lost her admiration for him: "he was enchanting, captivating, fascinating. And sweet . . . you couldn't know anyone who was so perfectly charming in every sense of the word. Difficult, but charming" (285).

Although Gilbert's book is aimed at general readers, she documents scrupulously and rarely speculates. (Not all of her material is equally reliable, as she herself recognizes; some of it is gossip, and Goddard's reminiscences are occasionally imprecise or inaccurate.) As her title suggests, she argues that Goddard was attracted to older men (father figures) with melancholy temperaments, the opposite of her own cheerful disposition, and that her relationship with Chaplin, who was "subject to bouts of tense manic activity, often followed by depression and withdrawal" (60), conformed to this pattern. While Gilbert doesn't explicitly link this description of Chaplin's temperament to Goddard's comments that Chaplin could be "difficult" and that genius was hard to live with, the connection is clearly implied.

Georgia Hale had almost as much opportunity to observe Chaplin as Goddard. Her association with him began in 1924, when he hired her to replace the pregnant Lita Grey in *The Gold Rush*. She was his constant companion between 1927 and 1931, and continued to see him occasionally thereafter, lunching with him for the last time when he returned to the United States in 1972. *Intimate Close-Ups*, however, is not primarily about Chaplin but about Hale, and "intimate" proves to be a misnomer. Hale insists that her relationship with Chaplin remained platonic, in spite of his occasional protests. Otherwise the book offers no surprises—if indeed this is a surprise. Chaplin's personality was so multifarious and volatile that almost anything was possible for him.

Like many people who knew Chaplin well, Hale found it difficult to reconcile her idealized image of the Tramp, which Chaplin's behavior sometimes matched perfectly, with his intermittent periods of restless activity, coldness, and irritability. To explain this phenomenon, she postulates a Jekyll/Hyde dualism in his nature, labeling the two personas "Charlie" (Jekyll) and "Mr. Chaplin" (Hyde). Unfortunately, Hale has little to say about the causes of this dual personality, except to report that in one instance Chaplin was annoyed with her because he believed she was planning to sue him. Somehow, the fact that he continued to see her under such circumstances seems far more puzzling than his irritability.

Hale strikes the reader as an earnest, likable person with limited verbal and cognitive skills. Her grasp of syntax is precarious, her narrative often hazy, and she occasionally succumbs to fantasy. Nevertheless, Hale's book does corroborate other accounts of Chaplin's working methods and demeanor, and testifies to the intense devotion he could inspire in others. Chaplin's films often do evoke feelings of euphoria and spiritual renewal, and for Hale, this effect seems to have been somewhat more potent than usual.

Joyce Milton's *Tramp* is a slovenly, devious book, virtually guaranteed to antagonize anyone who cares enough about Chaplin to read it. Milton aims to liberate her reader from "sanitized versions of Chaplin's life," which presumably means Robinson's *Chaplin*. In her author's note, Milton insinuates that Robinson was "writing with the cooperation [read: censorship] of Lady Chaplin, and therefore passed very lightly over the more controversial areas of his subject's private life" (524). While Robinson certainly gives priority to Chaplin's work, he can hardly be accused of ignoring his faults. Milton, however, is obsessed with Chaplin's faults—real and imaginary. If Chaplin is Hale's Savior, he is Milton's Antichrist.

The basis for Milton's hostility is unclear. Perhaps she is trying to distance her approach from Robinson's more sympathetic, tolerant one, but her strident discussion of Chaplin's Second Front activity suggests that her antipathy is essentially political. Milton insists that Chaplin was a Communist, although everyone who knew him well, including Goddard, Hale, and avowed Communists like Dan James, were certain he was not. Radical ideas intrigued him, but Chaplin flirted with political theories rather than embracing them. Anyone who tries to define his political views is chasing a mirage.

While biographers are free to criticize their subjects, no respectable biographer—popular or scholarly—manipulates evidence to justify a preconceived opinion. Milton, however, caricatures Chaplin by

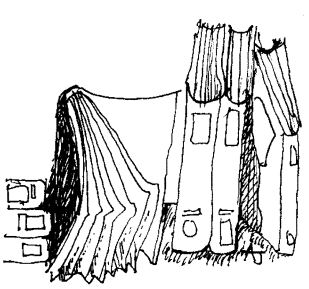
selective use of evidence, and presents highly suspect sources as if they were incontrovertible. In the most extreme cases, she makes blatant factual errors, distorts her sources through misleading paraphrase, or confidently makes statements that have no source at all. Even her infrequent comments on Chaplin's films are often grossly inaccurate.

Milton's paraphrase of Chaplin's description of Hetty Kelly is typical. Chaplin writes, "Her figure had developed, and I noticed the contours of her breasts and thought their protuberance small and not very alluring" (116). But according to Milton, "He . . . was disappointed to notice that she had developed breasts, which he did not find attractive" (15)—a reversal of Chaplin's meaning. Since Milton has just been discussing Chaplin's platonic attachment to 12-year-old Mabelle Fournier, she seems to want to suggest that Chaplin preferred a pubescent figure to a fully developed one. Such convenient distortion hardly seems accidental.

Milton soon becomes even more brazen, declaring that during puberty Charlie was "subject to devastating crushes on other boys" (30). No source is cited, probably because none exists. Carrying her speculations about Chaplin's androgyny even further, Milton suggests that Chaplin and his friend Ralph Barton, who was "clearly bisexual," were lovers. Her evidence? Chaplin reportedly had his portrait taken with Barton in a "Greek coin pose" (288). Precisely what Milton expects us to make of this phrase is beyond conjecture, but the photographer obviously meant a double profile.

These unsubstantiated speculations about Chaplin's sexuality point to the basic flaw of Milton's book, which is that she has no coherent interpretation of Chaplin to offer. Occasionally she gropes toward a thesis, suggesting that Chaplin suffered from bipolar (manic-depressive) disorder, which caused him to behave erratically and sometimes self-destructively. This claim has some basis in fact, but Milton never makes a sustained case for it—nor does the suggestion originate with her. A version of this argument (unacknowledged by Milton) first appeared in the Spring 1992 issue of *Film Quarterly*.

Tramp's sole virtue is that Milton draws on a number of sources currently unavailable in print. Unfortunately, her handling of printed sources is so corrupt that her use of these documents is highly suspect. Still, even small gains are better than none. By casting her net more widely than previous biographers, if only in the interest of scandalmongering, Milton has directed our attention to promising material that future Chaplin biographers can surely put to better use.



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Cinema and Painting

How Art Is Used in Film

By Angela Dalle Vacche. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1996. $45.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

If you are looking for a history of the appropriation of painting in film, this is not the book. But if you want an intensive, rather than extensive, study of the subject, one that is richly creative, this will satisfy you. The key is in the subtitle: *How Art Is Used in Film*. Dalle Vacche approaches the subject through case studies of eight films, ranging widely in subject, style, nationality, and chronology: Minnelli's *American in Paris* (1951), Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964), Rohmer's *The Marquise of O* (1975), Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965), Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966), Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Mizoguchi's *Five Women around Utamaro* (1946), and Cavalier's *Thérèse* (1986). The art mentioned is even more varied, from Russian icons to Japanese prints to German Romantic painting to the postwar Art Informel and Abstract Expressionism.

Dalle Vacche's choices are not always the obvious ones; two films are about artists, Andrei Rublev and Utamaro, but she chooses to focus on *American in Paris* instead of, for example, *Lust for Life*. Neither does she mention other major films about artists, such as *Moulin Rouge* or *Caravaggio* or *Vincent and Theo*. Her choices are primarily "art" films about historical characters (*Thérèse*, *Rublev*, *Utamaro*) or based on literary texts (*Marquise of O*, *Nosferatu*). Dalle Vacche acknowledges her most obvious omission, the director Peter Greenaway, but states that since his *Belly of an Architect* (1987) explores all the issues in her book, she has chosen instead to spread her "inquiry across many different personalities" (7).

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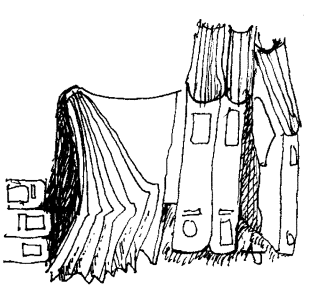

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Dalle Vacche distances her approach from the two major studies of this subject, Anne Hollander's *Mov-*

ing Pictures (1989) and Jacques Aumont's *L'oeil Interminable* (1991), finding Hollander's emphasis on Northern European painting too narrow and Aumont's theoretical approach too broad, since he does not do a close reading of the texts. She claims she is not interested in what kinds of paintings anticipated cinema as much as the ways cinema addresses painting.

Her approach is thematic and "the title of each chapter is meant to spell out the director's attitude toward painting" (2). For example, Antonioni's *Red Desert* uses "Painting as Ventriloquism and Color as Movement," while Rohmer's *The Marquise of O* is subtitled "Painting Thoughts, Listening to Images." Dalle Vacche states that her approach is also intertextual, but her explanation seems to conflate her method with that of her director subjects. It includes "the borrowing of images from art history to inflect the meaning of a text, the rejection of painting to stress the unique features of film, the insertion of cinema in broadly shared visual cultures and national traditions, and, finally, the power film-making has to redefine art history" (3). Dalle Vacche likens the structure of her book to "a necklace upon which eight different beads, so to speak, are strung on a thematic intertextual red thread" (3).

She focuses on the auteurs, using their statements about painting and art, and in the case of Murnau, even studying records at the University of Heidelberg to ascertain the influence of contemporary art historians on him. Far more than archival material, however, Dalle Vacche is indebted to semiotics and contemporary feminist theory. Sometimes her understanding of the use of painting in film seems elliptical and speculative, for example, the relationship between Pollock's energy and primitivism and Kelly's dancing in *American in Paris*, or the collusion of the human and the inorganic in Warhol and Antonioni. Other times she explores how the style of painting intersects the style of film—collage and Godard, for example. Dalle Vacche also cites specific paintings and the way they are appropriated by the film-makers—De Chirico for Antonioni, Fuseli for Rohmer, Friedrich for Murnau. In all cases, many more illustrations would have been helpful (Hollander's *Moving Pictures* is the model here).

While at times Dalle Vacche gives a strong historical context, especially in the chapter on Mizoguchi and his relation to his American censors in postwar Japan, she does not always give a broad enough art-historical context. In the chapter on *American in Paris*, Dalle Vacche does not question the idea that Paris is the place to go if you want to paint. Although she does discuss Pollock in relation to the film, she does not state the obvious: that in 1951, New York was rapidly replacing Paris as the center of the art world, and Abstract Expressionism was edging out the School of Paris.

Other times I feel Dalle Vacche does not go far enough with her art-historical allusions. She brilliantly matches Tarkovsky's technique with Malevich's suprematist composition, both of which attempt to make visible the invisible, but neglects to mention that Malevich in the late 20s occupied an analogous position to Tarkovsky in the late 60s. Both were criticized for emphasizing spiritual, not materialist, values.

Her most focused chapters are the most successful, especially dealing with Murnau and German painting, and Rohmer and Neoclassical and Romantic painting. She offers her last chapter, which focuses on Cavalier's *Thérèse*, as a way to revive art history through film studies, "to teach art history about itself" (7). It is subtitled "Still Life and the Close-Up as Feminine Space," and Dalle Vacche finds that the obsessive close-up technique in *Thérèse* "invokes a return to the mother-infant bond, a blissful state of fusion between self and other that only a mystic can parallel by becoming one with God" (223). Cavalier's close-up technique, focus on still-life objects, and lack of architectural context create a feminine sphere—the convent—outside of history and architecture, and in that way the film privileges feminine experience and the expression of feminine desire. Cavalier's technique in *Thérèse* is analogous to the radical nature of still life painting. Dalle Vacche's argument about still life is indebted to art historian Norman Bryson, who finds in still life allusions to women's silent work, which has been excluded from history. The relation of women's work and men's action is paralleled by the comparative reputation of still life and history painting. Still life was traditionally rated far below history painting in the hierarchy of genres since it did not depict great ideas (ideas only thought and acted out by men). Dalle Vacche finds still life potentially more radical than the female nude, since it is not a projection of male fantasy but, more subversively, an alternative order that decenters the masculine subject and is thus a way of subverting the traditional emphasis on history painting and male action. By furthering the dialogue between art history and film in such ways, Dalle Vacche enlarges their perspectives, making a valuable contribution to each.

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Cinema in Democratizing Germany

Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler

By Heide Fehrenbach. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. $18.95.

Common wisdom holds that West German film between the end of World War II and the rise of the alternative New German Cinema is hardly worth examining. Written off as escapist, nationalistic, or imitative of the superior American product, reconstruction cinema has never received the extended critical engagement awarded its Weimar, New German, or even Nazi counterparts. Heide Fehrenbach fills this void admirably with her thorough historical study of *Cinema in Democratizing Germany*. In "rehabilitating the Germans as historical agents in the reconstruction of their own identity" (6), Fehrenbach examines three specific issues: postwar occupation, markets, and American consumer culture; debates among Germans on the nature of democratic German culture; and film and film spectatorship in relation to social identity, with a particular stress on gender roles. She looks at a broad range of players in the institution of film—church and state leaders, film producers and enthusiasts, and a somewhat more nebulous category of "elites." These groups aimed to reinvent Germany as a "moral nation," and saw the basis of that nation in the patriarchal family, the normality of which had been so severely challenged by the final stages of the war and its aftermath. Fehrenbach analyzes the hotly contested points in reconstruction cinema to discover their connection to hopes and fears about renewing German national identity and culture.

One of the many strengths of *Cinema in Democratizing Germany* is Fehrenbach's understanding that these hopes and fears in relation to cinema have a long history in Germany. In chapter 1, "Cinema and German Society before 1945," she reviews the debates about *Filmwirkung*, "the psychological, emotional, and moral effects of movies on viewers" (12). As early as 1917, cultural conservatives and the state split over the pragmatic potentials of *Filmwirkung*. Though seen at first (ca. 1910) as a purely disruptive force in culture, film soon became attractive to the government as a means to combat foreign images of Germany and secure national sentiment behind the war effort. The industry was largely privatized after WWI, but successful promoters such as Erich Pommer realized the importance of the nation's image in *Filmwirkung* and the necessity of offering a product that differed from Hollywood films by concentrating on perceptions of German identity. The Nazis reinvigorated the government's engagement with the "positive" potential of *Filmwirkung* for the German nation, in part with propaganda pieces such as *Triumph of the Will* and *Jew Süß*, but more so with entertainment pictures. Fehrenbach's overview of these periods stresses the continuities between the Kaiser Reich and the Third Reich, and implicitly argues against seeing the latter as an anomaly in German history.

In her second chapter, "From Military Surveillance to Self-Supervision: American Occupation and the Politics of Film," Fehrenbach reintroduces a figure from Weimar cinema who suggested that *Filmwirkung* could be a means of dealing with the past through entertainment after the war (*aufarbeiten*). Erich Pommer understood the "political and spiritual," as well as the economic, implications of cinema (64). His notions for renewing German cinema corresponded with the U.S. occupational authority's design for a decartelized native industry that would promote democratization through a "'free market' approach to propaganda" (55); it did not, however, please the U.S. film industries, which demonized Pommer as a man out for revenge against the Hollywood in which he was "kicked around" during his exile (65). Here Fehrenbach argues convincingly against the commonplace that a uniform policy of cultural imperialism linked the U.S. government and industry on film policy. In her account of local, state, and national struggles over censorship and self-regulation, Fehrenbach shows the interrelated nature of a destabilized German masculinity and a disrupted national identity. The attempt to exert control over film production and reception was part of a larger campaign to normalize traditional gender roles and bring them into step with the demands of modern consumer society.

Chapters 3 ("*Die Sünderin* or Who Killed the German Man?: Early Postwar Cinema and the Betrayal of Fatherland") and 4 ("The Fight for the 'Christian West': Film Control and the Reconstruction of Civil Society") turn to the issue of the German man as a social problem, explored through the debates surrounding Willi Forst's 1951 film, *Die Sünderin* (*The Sinning Woman*). Fehrenbach finds that the film's depiction of German masculinity in crisis, despite its ultimately conservative resolution, provokes what turns out to be the broadest protest against a film in German cinema history. She sets her analysis of *Die Sünderin* against the background of the conservative social policies during early reconstruction, the strength and ambition of churches as

organizers of thought and behavior, and the degradation of German manhood in the eyes of the post-WWII population. This section of *Cinema in Democratizing Germany* combines the best of sociological film analysis and historical research, and includes a particularly strong reading of the way men's eyes need to be sovereign in the visual field for all to be right with this world.

In chapter 5 ("Popular Cinema, Spectatorship, and Identity"), Fehrenbach continues her exploration of viewing preferences, employing a notion of "spectatorship" to unify a discussion of the personal pleasures and relationships to films both during and following the viewing. She links audience desires for postwar normalization with the themes of three successful *Heimatfilme* (homeland-films). These films offered a number of avenues of escapism, not the least of which was the pleasurable distraction found in a visual excess that does little to advance the plot. Of greater significance, however, is the similarity of these viewing preferences to those which, while not specific to Nazi ideology, had been catered to during the Nazi period. By locating the appeal of these films in spectatorship, Fehrenbach points to important historical continuities and yet avoids the knotty problem of essentialism that often accompanies discussions of *Heimat,* a specifically "German" genre.

Fehrenbach turns her attention to younger viewers in her last three chapters, which, while offering some insights, are less powerful than her earlier analyses. The solidly researched discussion of the 1950s film clubs and their influence in shaping both new audiences and an alternative, though largely apolitical, space in the market fills an important gap the history of German film. The theme of continuity between film periods returns as the film clubs' leaders are linked to both the past and future of German film. They had roots in the film culture of the Third Reich and yet would in turn exercise tremendous influence on the so-called Oberhauseners, whose "revolt" in 1962 inaugurated the New German Cinema. Fehrenbach again stresses the role that local political interests played in shaping this rebellion by comparing the development of the two major festivals of the 1950s: Mannheim and Oberhausen. Yet Fehrenbach does not neglect the national and international political context, for she depicts the rise of the Berlin Film Festival to a status equaling that of Cannes and Venice as a moment in West Germany's cultural relegitimation within the West, and as an outpost of Western cultural and economic success within the East.

Cinema in Democratizing Germany provides an invaluable study of the film politics at work in post-WWII (West) Germany by combining meticulous and extensive historical research with interesting cultural analysis. To my mind, however, it does have a shortcoming in each of these areas—one very specific, the other somewhat more general. In her historical contextualization, Fehrenbach draws a parallel between the crisis of German masculinity and the entry of Russian soldiers into Berlin along with the widespread rape of German women (95). Later she uses "Russian raping raids" as a cipher for the background to the postwar strain on gender relations (109). While her discussion of the manner in which German men sought to restabilize themselves by reestablishing domination over women is convincing, Fehrenbach's formulation leaves two problematic impressions. First, that all rape was committed by Russian soldiers (indeed, it was not even all committed by Soviet soldiers). Second, Fehrenbach's repeated example inadvertently dovetails with the current movement in Germany's public discourse to focus on the GDR as the site of German identity trouble, which indirectly legitimizes the FRG's past and pushes aside other issues (Nazism and the Holocaust) of coming to terms with the past.

One also wishes that Fehrenbach were more familiar with cultural texts and contexts. Though balanced by a knowledge of experts' secondary work, this blind spot occasionally leads to minor errors and causes Fehrenbach to miss points at which she could have bolstered her argument. For example, her reading of the way the *Heimatfilm* turns emigration from a political choice into a "psychological state of denial" would have been even more convincing if coupled with a discussion of similar rereadings of history in the literary notion of "inner emigration."

But in the context of the entire book, these are very minor problems. *Cinema in Democratizing Germany* will become essential reading to those working in German film and/or culture studies, and will be of interest to anyone concerned with the interrelationship of politics, economics, and culture. Like all really good studies, Fehrenbach's work answers many questions and gives rise to new ones. For example, in what ways does this exploration of German film help us understand and transcend national boundaries in studying international culture without simply tossing about words such as "global"? What could we learn by placing Fehrenbach's study of the cinematic response to a perceived crisis of German masculinity after WWII next to, say, Kaja Silverman's work on American masculinity in the same period (which, though based in different theoretical models, yields such similar results)? And what are we to make of the parallels between Goebbel's commitment

to entertainment as the most effective means of propaganda, Pommer's belief in entertainment as a means of getting over the past, and U.S. (military) support for entertainment as the basis of a "free market approach to propaganda"? *Cinema in Democratizing Germany* offers both an important model and a jumping-off point for future attempts to come to grips with the international, national, and local moments of cultural politics.

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Cultures of Vision

Images, Media, and the Imaginary

By Ron Burnett. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995. $39.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

After at least a decade in which poststructuralism has dominated high theory, a number of important new works have appeared that call into question top-down paradigms of discourse and language even as they reappraise the fundamental importance of vision and image in contemporary culture. *Cultures of Vision* by Ron Burnett is one of those books. Along with Martin Jay's *Downcast Eyes* (1993) and Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* (1992), Burnett's work helps comprise an emerging field of visual-culture studies and addresses a key gap in the existing literature on the subject. Whereas Jay's history excavates the philosophical tradition arrayed against ocularcentrism, and Sobchack's phenomenology theorizes vision as an "embodied" process, Burnett's ambitious study ranges far and wide to argue that vision is far more than a coding/decoding process, an engagement with spectacle, or even a "reflection" of the mind.

In an attempt to move beyond vision/thought binarism, Burnett claims that the "eye (is) the very site of perception, thought, reflection, communication and representation" (4). In his critique of favored modernist "spatial" metaphors for vision (paradigms that effectively disengage the audience), he argues that it is "crucial to subjectivize the window," and that visual "experiences remain ephemeral . . . (in) a continuum for which there are not many markers" (7). While this gambit may seem to affirm the mystery and relativism of the image, this is far from the case. Even Burnett later acknowledges the potential danger that his model of ephemerality can "descend into anarchic relativism" if context and specificity are ignored (135). "Vision," then, is defined by Burnett as "the cultural *approach* to seeing and thinking" (8, italics mine), and much of the book that follows stands as solid cultural and social analysis. Furthermore, by targeting his study on the problem of "what stands between the eyes and knowledge," Burnett in effect shifts the traditional terms of media analysis away from either stylistic or ontological concerns to "epistemological" ones—and to cognition.

This philosophical gauntlet makes *Cultures of Vision* timely but also occasionally frustrating, for Burnett's method of writing is less a linear explication of this model (vision as cognitive, experiential, and embodied) than it is a rich tapestry of accumulating insights gleaned from 78 different essays centered around visual analysis. The logic of *Cultures of Vision* is grounded in a sweeping analytical sample of cultural images, from still photography to film to video to visual anthropology to fan cultures to cyberspace. Burnett makes these disparate, global, phenomena speak to one other, and so creates a compelling evidentiary base and an argument that gains momentum with each case study.

Burnett posits the model of "projection" as an alternative to those dominant theoretical models that he considers bankrupt: image paradigms based on "referentiality," "information," or "causality" (137); or theories that presuppose that media images "construct" viewing subjects. Projection, by contrast, is far more than either "watching" or "interpretation," for the act of seeing involves *all* of the other human senses and desires, including smell and hearing (204, 205). Images don't produce or offer experiences, they "create the field within which a whole host of possibilities can be generated" by the lived subject (206). Turning the model of the image-constructed viewer on its head, Bennett argues that humans constitute themselves "by using images to create a context within which new and unpredictable meanings arise" (215). Rather than being worked on by images, human subjects engage and hail images in an ongoing sensory-cognitive process clearly marked by identity, explanation, and interpretation.

Cultures of Vision, therefore, offers a useful antidote to the currently fashionable theory of the "paranoid subject," imported from Sartre, Foucault, and Virilio. While media theory now celebrates audience-debilitating visual "surveillance" as a defining trait of the postmodern media spectacle, Bennett's logic is far less reductive even as he analyzes many of the same

to entertainment as the most effective means of propaganda, Pommer's belief in entertainment as a means of getting over the past, and U.S. (military) support for entertainment as the basis of a "free market approach to propaganda"? *Cinema in Democratizing Germany* offers both an important model and a jumping-off point for future attempts to come to grips with the international, national, and local moments of cultural politics.

JOHN E. DAVIDSON

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Cultures of Vision

Images, Media, and the Imaginary

By Ron Burnett. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995. $39.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

After at least a decade in which poststructuralism has dominated high theory, a number of important new works have appeared that call into question top-down paradigms of discourse and language even as they reappraise the fundamental importance of vision and image in contemporary culture. *Cultures of Vision* by Ron Burnett is one of those books. Along with Martin Jay's *Downcast Eyes* (1993) and Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* (1992), Burnett's work helps comprise an emerging field of visual-culture studies and addresses a key gap in the existing literature on the subject. Whereas Jay's history excavates the philosophical tradition arrayed against ocularcentrism, and Sobchack's phenomenology theorizes vision as an "embodied" process, Burnett's ambitious study ranges far and wide to argue that vision is far more than a coding/decoding process, an engagement with spectacle, or even a "reflection" of the mind.

In an attempt to move beyond vision/thought binarism, Burnett claims that the "eye (is) the very site of perception, thought, reflection, communication and representation" (4). In his critique of favored modernist "spatial" metaphors for vision (paradigms that effectively disengage the audience), he argues that it is "crucial to subjectivize the window," and that visual "experiences remain ephemeral . . . (in) a continuum for which there are not many markers" (7). While this gambit may seem to affirm the mystery and relativism of the image, this is far from the case. Even Burnett later acknowledges the potential danger that his model of ephemerality can "descend into anarchic relativism" if context and specificity are ignored (135). "Vision," then, is defined by Burnett as "the cultural *approach* to seeing and thinking" (8, italics mine), and much of the book that follows stands as solid cultural and social analysis. Furthermore, by targeting his study on the problem of "what stands between the eyes and knowledge," Burnett in effect shifts the traditional terms of media analysis away from either stylistic or ontological concerns to "epistemological" ones—and to cognition.

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media phenomena thought to be part of the new electronic "panopticon." But even as the book produces historical evidence of active viewer-image engagement, it is in no way a naïve exercise in boosterism for "participatory" media production activities. Far from it.

Burnett's guarded but extensive analysis of "alternative" and "community" video is one of the chief contributions of the book. Independent video and video art have always had an uneasy relationship to academic media theory (given their divergent institutional origins in, respectively, art-world and scholarly subcultures), and many of the original writings on alternative video practice are rightly criticized by Burnett as utopian and politically problematic. Nevertheless, as academic critical theory rotely "countered" television and the culture industry over the years, alternative video frequently took on an obligatory fallback position; standing in uncritically as fleeting proof that emancipatory "practice" must indeed be possible. Yet critical accounts of alternative video rarely theorized through the discursive inertia initiated by activist and alternative orthodoxies: artists' statements, the manifesto aesthetic, and curatorial apologetics.

Cultures of Vision, by contrast, challenges the contextless "appropriation" assumptions of small-format video activists (235); the "pedagogical" pretenses of experimental, identity-politics essentialisms (255); and the "therapeutic impulses of alternative media" (256). These therapeutic, pedagogical, and technology-appropriation mythologies have together had the opposite effect of stated activist and emancipatory ends: they tend to create an "impenetrable and monolithic Other" (the industry), and an "oppositional strategy that presumes that people, viewers, consumers . . . are passive victims of the culture they inhabit" (256). Burnett also critiques international efforts in community video for perpetuating the same kind of power imbalance that foreign aid and development initiatives utilize (227). Even the favored activist tactic of "giving a voice" to the dispossessed is called to task.

Although the book is much more than a critique of alternative practice, Burnett, a media-maker himself, patiently works through these tactical histories to shake down viable models and precedents for contemporary media practice. The video work done by Eric Michaels among Australian aboriginal cultures, for example, challenges a number of trends in both media theory and visual anthropology (292–301). Burnett finds ethnography generally unwilling to grant to aboriginal subjects the kind of context-sensitive, creative reception (including even their unorthodox "accommodation" of Hollywood imagery) that Michaels demonstrates at work in the video practices of the Walpiri (292–93). Burnett then ends his analysis of "postmodern media communities" by linking an extended deconstruction of Jean Baudrillard to Sadie Benning's small-format confessional work, produced on a Pixelvision camera (318–34). In the world of Burnett's postmodernism, then, apocalyptic Baudrillard meets eclectic, girl-culture Benning—and Benning wins.

The works of the Walpiri, Michaels, and Benning are highlighted at the end of *Cultures of Vision,* arguably because they reject the standard "mainstream" vs. "alternative" dichotomy that characterizes the history of independent video. By doing so they also bolster Burnett's argument that viewing is an exploratory and meaning-driven phenomenon; an act of creative engagement in the face of visual excess. The implications of this focus are not hard to see: if creative resistance is a defining part of viewers/consumers, then alternative work as traditionally construed is an anachronism. Viewing subjects are now an active part of a multichannel, popular, electronic culture—a commercial world that Burnett takes far more seriously than his theoretical predecessors, Youngblood, Enzensberger, and others. This engagement of and reconsideration of popular media and television is an important shift for theorists of radical media, but it merits one cautionary note. While Burnett continues to tie viewer engagement to production practice, the discovery and celebration of fan "resistance" over the past decade by television and cultural studies scholars like John Fiske and others has led to less convincing notions: that all viewing is somehow radical and that resistance is merely a semiotic and interpretive operation. Politics and power are still far more than just "signifying practices," and Burnett's phenomenological method—one that sees viewer projection as both psychological and cultural —seems to save him from critical theory's now commonplace celebrations of audience power.

While the book's intellectual sweep posits *Cultures of Vision* as a work of revisionist theory, I began to consider the valuable ways that it could be used in upper division and graduate courses in video practice and production as well. The many case studies not only historically ground inductive assertions about perception and cognition, they also provide a rich set of nuanced interrogations of independent and commercial practice. Previously celebrated as part of a politics of participatory reflexivity, for example, the independent/scholarly practice of "returning" to screen works for community members as (and for) "feedback" recuperates the paternalistic notion that

such subjects would not otherwise have at their disposal a comparable perceptual "mirror" (275)—or a political self-consciousness of their own, for that matter. Media-makers, then, will find in this work a different set of assumptions about the politics of "practice"—defined not by a theory of the resistant maker, but by a theory of an embodied and engaged viewer.

JOHN T. CALDWELL

■ John T. Caldwell teaches at the University of California, San Diego, and is the author of *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television.*

Engaging Characters

Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema

By Murray Smith. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. $55.00 cloth; $22.00 paper.

How do fictional cinematic narratives create emotional responses in spectators? How do aspects of characterization and narration work to structure those responses? Why do spectators respond positively to some characters and negatively to others? Such questions lie at the heart of any theory of spectatorship, but lately they have received relatively scant attention in cinema studies. In *Engaging Characters*, Murray Smith attempts to answer these and other questions by fundamentally recasting current discourses on spectatorial engagement. Smith's book is a welcome addition to any film library, especially for those interested in issues of affect, aesthetics, characterization, and narration.

Drawing on work in literary theory, cognitive anthropology, and analytic philosophy, Smith fashions a theory of emotional engagement intended to remedy some of the shortcomings he sees in psychoanalytic and ideological criticism. As Smith points out, previous discussions of emotion are often subsumed in the muddled notion of "identification," a concept that has a long history in film and dramaturgical theory, but which has come to mean many different things to many different people (including sympathy, empathy, attachment, optical point of view, or a narcissistic psychic engagement with the camera). With all of these meanings in circulation, the current discourse on cinematic identification is especially prone to terminological slippage and ends up obscuring rather than clarifying the concept.

Because of these problems, Smith proposes jettisoning such blanket terms altogether. Instead he suggests that they be replaced by a "system which posits several distinct *levels of engagement* which together comprise what I call a *structure of sympathy*" (5). These levels correspond with certain autonomic, cognitive, and emotional processes in the spectator, all of which combine to form a limitless variety of complex engagement patterns. Smith then offers a brief but insightful analysis of *The Accused* to show how these levels of engagement produce a structure more attuned to the range of emotional and attitudinal perspectives represented within the film. Focusing on the key scene of Sarah Tobias's brutal gang rape, Smith argues that the film's representation of the rape is actually more complicated and multilayered than when read through the reductive filter of singular identification.

Structured in two parts, the remainder of the book spells out many of the ideas contained in this brief analysis. In the first section, Smith lays the groundwork for his theory of character engagement by differentiating it from structuralist and poststructuralist models of character and spectatorship. A central component of his theory is the "person schema," a broad-based, crosscultural notion of human agency upon which more specific cultural conceptions of personhood are based. Drawing on the work of various anthropologists, Smith argues that the person schema is part of a "bridgehead" of assumptions common to all cultures, and further, that the schema undergirds both our everyday notion of causality and the process by which we imaginatively construct characters. As the fictive counterparts of human agents, characters must possess at least some of the basic features of the person schema. These include a discrete human body, self-awareness, emotions, persistent traits, and the capacity for self-impelled actions. In fact, as Smith notes, this person schmema is so fundamental that it is frequently used as a model for understanding nonhuman entities such as animals, computers, robots, and weather systems.

In part 2, Smith outlines the three levels of engagement that make up what he terms the "structure of sympathy." The first level is recognition, and refers to the spectator's apprehension of characters as continuous and individuated narrative agents. Al-though recognition is a habituated aspect of narrative comprehension, it nonetheless accounts for a number of phenomena that facilitate more complex kinds of engagement. For example, the concept of recognition explains how we distinguish one character from another, separate main characters from subordinate characters, and grasp changes in a character's appearance over the course of a story. Although recognition in classical cinema is quite routine, it becomes a notice-

such subjects would not otherwise have at their disposal a comparable perceptual "mirror" (275)—or a political self-consciousness of their own, for that matter. Media-makers, then, will find in this work a different set of assumptions about the politics of "practice"—defined not by a theory of the resistant maker, but by a theory of an embodied and engaged viewer.

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able feature of our cognition when problematized as it is, for instance, by the double performer strategies of Raul Ruiz's *The Suspended Vocation* (1977) and Luis Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977).

The second level of engagement is alignment, which refers to "the entire range of possible articulations of spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access" (143). Because the latter two functions are strongly correlated with a narration's range and depth, structures of alignment subsume a number of devices commonly described as identificatory, such as optical POV shots, dreams, flashbacks, and voice-over narration. However, by differentiating these two narrative functions, Smith's model provides a more precise and discriminating set of terms to describe our relationship to characters. Moreover, this theoretical distinction is consistent with Smith's thesis that such devices serve an array of functions in film narration, and that films typically exhibit a range of attitudinal and emotional perspectives.

The third level of engagement is allegiance, and it is likely to be the most controversial part of Smith's theory. This level differs from the previous two in that it involves an emotional as well as a cognitive response. According to Smith, this emotional response is based on the spectator's assessment of a film's moral structure, which in turn leads to a sympathy with those figures who exhibit a more preferable set of character traits. Such sympathies are mobilized by elements such as iconography, physiognomy, character action, and music, and they lead to our emotional investment in certain characters (i.e., a desire to see heroes rewarded and villains foiled). Because spectators discern a moral structure largely by comparing one character's goals, behavior, and attitudes with those of others, moral structure is always a relational feature of the text. In a gangster film, the hero's actions may be only marginally more desirable than those of rival gangsters; in a romantic comedy, the hero's charm and wit may be only marginally more alluring than those of a rival suitor.

By employing concepts such as personhood and moral judgment, Smith's theory might appear to be a retreat into a kind of bourgeois humanism. Yet throughout his book, Smith attempts to forestall objections of this sort on a number of different fronts. First of all, he stresses that the notion of human agency does not mean that characters can be viewed as being somehow apart from the texts from which they are constructed. Secondly, Smith argues that a crosscultural notion of human agency does not preclude the discussion of more specific social roles and cultural formations. According to Smith, our judgments may be modified by larger historically and culturally situated belief systems, but they still rely on the film's own processes of moral orientation. Both of these claims are intended to refute charges that his theory leads to a univocal conception of ideology subject or that it precludes discussions of spectatorship in more specific social and cultural contexts.

That said, Smith's notion of allegiance could still use a little refinement. For one thing, the term "moral" carries connotations of rigidity, constancy, and supra-individuality that run counter to Smith's theorization of it as a relational, textually constructed system. For another, while the concept works well when applied to horror films, gangster films, and melodramas, it does not seem to fit film comedy very well. Many well-known comic characters display traits that are not morally desirable or even preferable. Peter Sellers' Inspector Clouseau character is a bumbling, dimwitted klutz. Jerry Lewis's Buddy Love (*The Nutty Professor* [1963]) is a rude, obnoxious egotist. And in *His Girl Friday* (1940), Cary Grant's Walter Burns is a liar and con man. Although all of these characters display a certain verve in their buffoonery, it seems counterintuitive to suggest that spectators sympathize with these comic heroes on moral grounds. But to some extent, the relational quality of a film's moral system helps to account for their positive valence. We laugh at comic heroes because of the way they undermine or violate codes of appropriate social behavior, not in spite of them.

Despite this minor objection, one of the great strengths of Smith's model is its breadth. The structure of sympathy he describes is one that proves useful whether discussing narrative conventions, patterns of cinematic narration, or more fine-grained textual analysis. Likewise, one is also impressed by Smith's range of examples, which run the gamut of cinematic traditions and encompass different genres, styles, and directors. Although Smith repeatedly returns to Hitchcock's 1956 remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* as a paradigmatic case, he draws other examples from Hollywood melodrama, Soviet montage cinema, and European art cinema. Other assets are Smith's beautifully clear and eminently readable prose style, and his lucid and convincing explanations of character engagement which consistently accord with our everyday experience. Although Smith synthesizes ideas from a number of theoretical perspectives, it is finally this commonsensical approach that makes *Engaging Characters* a unique and valuable entry into the ongoing debate about cinematic affect and identification.

JEFF SMITH

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The Gulf War Did Not Take Place

By Jean Baudrillard. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995. $25.00 cloth; $11.95 paper.

The Phantom Empire

By Geoffrey O'Brien. New York: W. W. Norton, 1995. $12.00.

The Gulf War Did Not Take Place and *The Phantom Empire* are two of the most important cultural studies texts of the mid-1990s; they are also two of the most attacked. Heralding a new style of critical discourse, or perhaps returning to a methodology popularized by Nietzsche in his final works, these two examinations of imagistic discourse in the domestic sphere credit no one but their respective authors, and appeal to no other authority to gain critical ballast. Thus they are brief, spare, and cleanly constructed; the usual critical apparatus of footnotes, parenthetical citations, and acknowledgments is altogether absent.

Baudrillard argues that the Persian Gulf War was a carefully scripted media event, the outcome of which was predestined from its inception; for Baudrillard, the entire conflict was designed to be televised in real time, as it unfolded (unlike Vietnam, where reportage involved at least a 24-hour time lag and was recorded mainly on film rather than tape), to be relayed, carefully censored and sanitized, into millions of homes, as a sort of awful balletic exercise with its own codes and ritualized spectacles. Those who perished in the course of this war were "sacrificed extras." Viewers saw only what the U.S. military wished them to see—images of effortless, empiric conquest bereft of death, suffering, or any other human dimension. In the postmortem on the war, Saddam Hussein emerges as a villain of extravagant, exaggerated proportions; equally inflated were American media constructs of an effortless victory. It's "nothing personal," as Baudrillard notes, "your war is of no interest to me, your resistance is of no interest to me. I will destroy you when I am ready."

For Americans unsure of their own social status at home, the spectacle of crushing, bloodless cultural supremacy is, Baudrillard argues, an inviting zone of safety. As such, it merges seamlessly with regular television programming, reconfiguring the Gulf War as a sort of epic miniseries scheduled to unfold over the course of several nights. I still remember watching "Nick at Night" running old sitcoms during the opening moments of the Gulf War; the network saw no need to interrupt "The Dick Van Dyke Show." Rather, a banner was run across the bottom of the screen—just as the fading images of Mary Tyler Moore and Rose Marie engaged in yet another tired bout of recycled slapstick—stating simply that "the Gulf War has begun. 'Nick at Nite' will keep you posted on details." Obviously, Baudrillard is correct in his central assertion: the Gulf War was in every sense of the word a non-event, a staged and fictive site of counter-programming. Why cut away to the product of a rival network? "Nick at Nite" will keep you posted on the final score.

Similarly, Geoffrey O'Brien's text has caused a minor uproar in moving-image studies because of the effortless sweep of his erudition, his refusal to indulge in manifestly artificial distinctions between high and low culture, and his entirely self-referential manner of discourse, which allows for no voice other than his own. Films are cited without naming the director, year, or any of the principal actors; O'Brien assumes that the reader knows this material, and refuses to be bogged down in the minutiae of taxonomic details. For those who need it, a complete list of cast and credits on the films discussed is appended to the end of the text, but there is no indexing, and no page-number references are given. While John Ashbery, among others, championed O'Brien's work, numerous others attacked the text as being self-centered, arrogant, and lacking the proper level of obeisance to constituted authority. Yet O'Brien recognizes no authority other than the domain of the visual, as constituted by a resolutely noncanonical group of films, including *The Moon Is Blue*, *Rescued by Rover*, *The Dark Mirror*, *Los Olvidados*, *Simba*, *Shaft in Africa,* and numerous other seemingly disparate titles that cut across traditional national, social, and temporal boundaries with exhilarating ease and assurance.

Designed in roughly chronological order, the book tracks the cultural dominance of American cinema in informing the global social order with such breathtaking economy that the entire project is accomplished in a mere 281 pages. As Ashbery notes, O'Brien's poetic approach to the material breathes new life into tired generic formulae, as in the chapter "The Italian System," which chronicles the recycling of the Hollywood mythos by Cinecittà Studios in the 1960s. Infuriating, elegant, and suffused with relaxed authority, *The Phantom Empire* is a meditation on the significatory power of the moving image to fabricate the circumstances of our imaginary existence, documented through literally thousands of often fugitive texts with which the author is obviously familiar.

Taken together, these two volumes signal a new direction in cultural studies, a direction in which the author forthrightly declares her/his personal invest-

ment in the material, centers her/himself as the author of the discourse at hand, and resolutely refuses to buttress the resultant text with extraneous material, either documentary or critical. This makes each author exquisitely vulnerable, if only because no other voice is ever allowed to enter into the discussion. At the same time, both volumes are paradoxically modest—Baudrillard and O'Brien refuse to place more importance upon themselves than this simple device allows. If these two writers are the authors of their respective texts, then we can apply only to them for some alternative approach to the material, and neither author wishes the reader to do this. Rather, with weary, omniscient elegance, the authors track our collective dreams of conquest and empire through two sets of narrative constructs: war news "reportage" as fiction, and the "fiction" of the Hollywood cinema as the truth we wish to embrace. Both Baudrillard and O'Brien have thus produced texts of stunning cultural density and multivalence, texts that resonate in the mind of the attentive reader long after the last page has been read. In short, if you read these two brief, unassuming books with any degree of care, you will never view the canonical cinema, or the reportage of the television networks, without being aware of the degree of social manipulation that is inherently involved in both enterprises.

WHEELER WINSTON DIXON

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Landscapes of Resistance

The German Films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub

By Barton Byg. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995. $50.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

In 1971, the late Richard Roud wrote a groundbreaking book on the work of film-makers Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, which (of necessity) concentrated on the early years of these gifted cinéastes' careers. Now, Barton Byg has continued the discussion of Huillet and Straub in a new and brilliant analysis of their work, favoring the couple's "German" productions. For Byg, the issue of German identity is crucial in any consideration of Huillet and Straub's work. The Brechtian films of Straub/Huillet are recognized and championed as perhaps the most radical and aesthetically challenging of the New German Cinema, yet the artists brought an "outsiders'" perspective to their treatment of German culture and politics (they moved to Germany from France). As Byg notes in his introduction, their outsider status "allowed them to engage with German culture with a combination of critical distance and affectation inaccessible to most German artists."

Landscapes of Resistance is a remarkable cross-cultural study in that it remaps the oeuvre of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub across the interdisciplinary locations of cultural studies, feminist film theory, and German modernism. In addition, Byg draws upon the writings of Adorno, Brecht, and Benjamin to reposition the Straub/Huillet films in a fresh perspective. This provides political, cultural, and Marxist theoretical context to an examination of the politics of Brechtian cinema, especially in the final chapter, "Real History and the Nonexistent Spectator." Here Byg takes on the critics who regard Huillet and Straub as elitists who make films "for intellectuals who hate the movies." Byg applies Adorno to the uncompromising formal aesthetics of Huillet and Straub, noting that "by insisting on its negation of things-as-they-are, art proves the possibility that things can be changed." In this chapter alone, Byg more than meets one of his own primary goals in *Landscapes of Resistance*—successfully highlighting the utopian/dystopian embrace of "rediscovering the fundamental visual pleasure of cinema" in the work of Huillet and Straub.

In addition, Byg is to be commended for his egalitarian treatment of the collaborative team of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub. As Byg notes, Huillet and Straub actually share authorial credit on nearly all their works, yet Straub is often cited as the primary, even sole, author of their work. This erasure of the collaborative nature of Straub/Huillet is duly noted in this study. Byg deftly chooses ample citations from interviews with the film-makers to illustrate the pernicious pattern of this erasure. On the question of authorship, for example, Byg cites Huillet as saying, "What interests us are the products and not the names."

Determined to resist the machine of (Adorno's) culture industry, Straub/Huillet are famous for using silence and absence as creative tools, both in their lives and in their art. Their approach to narrative is to use emptiness in the frame. Their actors deliver their lines with an absence of preconceived emotion. Many

ment in the material, centers her/himself as the author of the discourse at hand, and resolutely refuses to buttress the resultant text with extraneous material, either documentary or critical. This makes each author exquisitely vulnerable, if only because no other voice is ever allowed to enter into the discussion. At the same time, both volumes are paradoxically modest—Baudrillard and O'Brien refuse to place more importance upon themselves than this simple device allows. If these two writers are the authors of their respective texts, then we can apply only to them for some alternative approach to the material, and neither author wishes the reader to do this. Rather, with weary, omniscient elegance, the authors track our collective dreams of conquest and empire through two sets of narrative constructs: war news "reportage" as fiction, and the "fiction" of the Hollywood cinema as the truth we wish to embrace. Both Baudrillard and O'Brien have thus produced texts of stunning cultural density and multivalence, texts that resonate in the mind of the attentive reader long after the last page has been read. In short, if you read these two brief, unassuming books with any degree of care, you will never view the canonical cinema, or the reportage of the television networks, without being aware of the degree of social manipulation that is inherently involved in both enterprises.

WHEELER WINSTON DIXON

■ Wheeler Winston Dixon is chairperson of the Film Studies Program at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln; his *The Exploding Eye: A Re-Visionary Histry of the American Experimental Cinema* is forthcoming from SUNY Press.

Landscapes of Resistance

The German Films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub

By Barton Byg. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995. $50.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

In 1971, the late Richard Roud wrote a groundbreaking book on the work of film-makers Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, which (of necessity) concentrated on the early years of these gifted cinéastes' careers. Now, Barton Byg has continued the discussion of Huillet and Straub in a new and brilliant analysis of their work, favoring the couple's "German" productions. For Byg, the issue of German identity is crucial in any consideration of Huillet and Straub's work. The Brechtian films of Straub/Huillet are recognized and championed as perhaps the most radical and aesthetically challenging of the New German Cinema, yet the artists brought an "outsiders'" perspective to their treatment of German culture and politics (they moved to Germany from France). As Byg notes in his introduction, their outsider status "allowed them to engage with German culture with a combination of critical distance and affectation inaccessible to most German artists."

Landscapes of Resistance is a remarkable cross-cultural study in that it remaps the oeuvre of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub across the interdisciplinary locations of cultural studies, feminist film theory, and German modernism. In addition, Byg draws upon the writings of Adorno, Brecht, and Benjamin to reposition the Straub/Huillet films in a fresh perspective. This provides political, cultural, and Marxist theoretical context to an examination of the politics of Brechtian cinema, especially in the final chapter, "Real History and the Nonexistent Spectator." Here Byg takes on the critics who regard Huillet and Straub as elitists who make films "for intellectuals who hate the movies." Byg applies Adorno to the uncompromising formal aesthetics of Huillet and Straub, noting that "by insisting on its negation of things-as-they-are, art proves the possibility that things can be changed." In this chapter alone, Byg more than meets one of his own primary goals in *Landscapes of Resistance*—successfully highlighting the utopian/dystopian embrace of "rediscovering the fundamental visual pleasure of cinema" in the work of Huillet and Straub.

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Determined to resist the machine of (Adorno's) culture industry, Straub/Huillet are famous for using silence and absence as creative tools, both in their lives and in their art. Their approach to narrative is to use emptiness in the frame. Their actors deliver their lines with an absence of preconceived emotion. Many

times they use actors who do not even speak German. Huillet and Straub freely adapt and appropriate German material from the prose of Kafka and Böll to the operas of Schoenberg and the writings of Hölderlin. Their films, as Byg demonstrates, confront the silence around the artificial gap between high and low culture. Like the films of Godard and Akerman, the work of Straub/Huillet moves the viewer into a contemplation of the cinematic apparatus itself. Huillet and Straub articulate a new cinema language and a new German landscape. Byg notes, "Straub/Huillet seek the seeds of resistance in the exile of language" fostering a "displacement, Europeanization, and humanization of German culture."

Throughout this study, Byg combines a refreshing amount of production history with theoretical analysis and cultural context. In the chapter on the making of *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, for example, Byg details the difficulties that Huillet and Straub encountered with their first collaborative film, which was released as their third film. Part of the resistance to the project on the part of financiers was the fact that the work was not easily definable as either documentary or fiction. Presaging Trinh T. Minh-ha's assertion that documentary film doesn't exist, *Chronicle* operates in that space between the competing narrative forms of fiction and documentary. In all aspects of *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, Straub/Huillet chose to avoid cinematic clichés and traditions. Byg carefully documents the reasons and consequences of the film-makers' various creative choices, from the film's subject (Bach, a German cultural icon) to the manner of creating the sequences in the film around the live recording of long sequences of uninterrupted musical performance (rather than around a fictionalized biographical sequence of shots). The formalistic camerawork, consisting of a number of long takes of Gustav Leonhardt (as Bach) and Christiane Lang-Drewanz (as Anna Magdalena Bach), intercut with pans across two-dimensional surfaces, is used to call attention to the formalist nature of the film itself. Byg accurately perceives the politics of *Chronicle* as a complex performative poetics of resistance—resistance not only to narrative overdetermination but also to death, as represented by the voice-over of the fictional Anna, whose memory is used to inscribe and resist the act of biography. This reading of *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* is underscored by Byg's ability to place the film within the cultural context of Germany and its unique and problematic location in the history, memory, and retrieval of German culture.

Chapter 4, "Formalism and Political Radicalism in the Short Films of the 1960s," treats *Machorka-Muff* (1962) and *The Bridegroom, the Comedienne, and the Pimp* (1968). *Machorka-Muff* was based on Heinrich Böll's short story, "Bonn Diary." As Byg notes, this story was intensely antimilitarist, as is *Machorka-Muff*, which Straub referred to as the story of a rape—the rape of Germany by the military. Not surprisingly, the Straub/Huillet team again found a great deal of resistance to both the funding and the release of *Machorka-Muff*. Byg notes how the film was almost doomed to nonexistence because of financing problems; after its release, *Machorka-Muff* was initially rejected by the Berlin Film Festival of 1965. To make matters worse, Böll's publisher ordered the film be destroyed. Huillet and Straub had struck an informal arrangement with Böll himself, neglecting to consult Böll's publisher before producing the film. Eventually, however, they worked out an agreement with the publisher, and the film became a success in critical circles. Still, as Byg notes, the film at the time was deemed by most "too radical to be comprehensible."

Nevertheless, Huillet and Straub returned to similar themes with *Not Reconciled, or Only Violence Helps Where Violence Rules* (1964–65), based on Heinrich Böll's novel *Billiards at Half Past Nine*, to which Byg devotes an entire chapter. Perhaps one of the most difficult and densely structured of all the Straub/Huillet films, *Not Reconciled* also met with considerable critical resistance from German film critics and theoreticians of the period. Byg chronicles the cultural reception of these films, noting that by 1968, in part because of the rise of the student movement, audiences were ready to accept the couple's next work, *The Bridegroom, the Comedienne, and the Pimp*, which won a major award at the Mannheim Film Festival in 1968. Surprisingly, Byg devotes few pages to the film, though he does briefly sketch its formal elements and he underscores its thematic treatment of women as prisoners, class issues, and the theater.

Landscapes of Resistance's strongest chapter, "Film as Translation," offers a compelling meditation on the films of Huillet and Straub, drawing upon the work of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man. Byg convincingly illustrates the ways in which these theorists have profoundly influenced the structural formatting embraced by Huillet and Straub in such later films as *The Death of Empedocles* (1986) and *Antigone* (1991-92). The sculptural austerity of the film-makers transcendent vision is, Byg argues, the perfect medium for the advancement of Benjamin's and de Man's disciplined views of human social intercourse. Here, as elsewhere within the text, Byg's analysis is both informed and sympathetic, yet his particular admiration for these difficult and intensely beautiful films comes through in the text of this impassioned chapter. In chapters 6, 7, and 8 of this volume, Byg offers careful readings

of other late Straub/Huillet films, including *Moses and Aaron* (1972), *Class Relations* (1983), *History Lessons* (1972), and *Too Early, Too Late* (1980–81); all of these films deserve a far wider audience that they have received, and are both accessible and pleasurable, in complete opposition to the received reputation of Huillet and Straub as supposedly "difficult" film-makers.

It is ironic that, although relatively unseen and generally unavailable on video, the work of Huillet and Straub remains enormously influential. Admired by Deleuze, Stockhausen, Duras, Robbe-Grillet, Godard, and numerous other artists, theorists, and cinéastes, the films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub deserve the widest possible audience, and Byg's incisive study of their films will certainly go a long way toward achieving this goal. The films of Fassbinder and Herzog long ago achieved general currency; Huillet and Straub are long overdue for similar critical attention.

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■ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster is an assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and the author of *Women Filmmakers of theAfrican and Asian Diaspora* (Southern Illinois University Press).

Lovers of Cinema

The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945

Edited by Jan-Christopher Horak. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. $49.95.

One often hears the phrase "this is an indispensable book" in connection with a review of a work of critical theory and/or history; sometimes the phrase is hyberbolic. In this instance, however, the claim is wholly justifiable: *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945* is indeed a book that the conscientious film scholar cannot afford to be without, and demonstrates convincingly that New Historicism is a pursuit that must be taken seriously if we are to keep abreast of new research in cinema history. This volume, with essays by Horak, Kristin Thompson, Brian Taves, William Moritz, Chuck Kleinhans, Tom Gunning, Lauren Rabinovitz, and others, offers a fresh look at the work of American experimental film-making during its formative years, as well as rescuing marginalized films and film-makers from the borders of historical discourse. The text also clears up numerous errors of historical fact that have been handed down as gospel throughout the years, and showcases the careers and works of such gifted artists as Mary Ellen Bute, Theodore Huff, Man Ray, Dudley Murphy, and Ralph Steiner, to mention just a few.

Most pressing is the enormous task of historical revision and correction that this volume successfully undertakes, a task the various contributors meet with singular distinction. Horak's introductory essay for the volume, "History in the Gaps," sets the tone of the work as a whole, promising the reader an enormous amount of new information on the artists and films that comprise the noncanonical American independent cinema, a promise that the book more than follows through on. In chapter 2 of the text, also titled "The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945," Horak offers a brief overview of the film-makers to be examined in the essays that follow, and cites the works of Sara Arledge, Roger Barlow, Rudy Burckhardt, Mary Ellen Bute, Joseph Cornell, Lewis Jacobs, Ralph Steiner, Paul Strand, and many others as proof of the fact that there was a thriving American experimental film-making scene before Maya Deren, Kenneth Anger, Harry Smith, and other "second wavers" burst onto the scene in the 1940s.

As the former senior curator of film collections at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York (he is now director of the Munich Film Museum and professor at the Munich Television and Film Academy), Jan-Christopher Horak brings a scholarly generosity and an archivist's zeal to the construction of this chapter. Rare photographs of film-makers, accompanied by frame enlargements from the films under discussion, are liberally used throughout the text, and give the reader a visual link to the past, further highlighting the immediacy of Horak's work. The photograph on page 16, for example, of The Cinema Crafters of Philadelphia in 1929 (Tibby Lear, Jo Gerson, Betty John, Louis Hirshman, and Lewis Jacobs) acts as a window to the past of American experimental cinema, allowing the reader to see the faces and attitudes of those film-makers who first beat out the path to an individual vision on the screen. Not surprisingly, the history of these pioneer experimentalists is one of minuscule budgets, hurried production schedules, exploitation by distributors and theater owners, personal privation, and an unswerving desire to see their ideas transformed into images thrown on the cinema screen. Horak affords the reader a superbly detailed examination of the very first avant-garde films produced in this country and offers detailed documentation (as is the case throughout this meticulously researched text) in support of his discussion, citing

of other late Straub/Huillet films, including *Moses and Aaron* (1972), *Class Relations* (1983), *History Lessons* (1972), and *Too Early, Too Late* (1980–81); all of these films deserve a far wider audience that they have received, and are both accessible and pleasurable, in complete opposition to the received reputation of Huillet and Straub as supposedly "difficult" film-makers.

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earlier studies, research sites where the interested scholar may view the works in question, and letters from film-makers and scholars that add a new dimension of totality to the discussion.

Kristin Thompson's chapter, "The Limits of Experimentation in Hollywood," highlights the early careers and experimental works of Edgar M. Keller, Maurice Tourneur, Ray C. Smallwood, Joseph De Grasse, Josef von Sternberg, James Cruze, and others, demonstrating that their vision as artists was effectively limited by the narrativist constraints of the Hollywood cinematic apparatus, and suggesting that each of these talented artists might have been capable of a great deal more if given financial support without the concomitant strings attached by the studio system, with its increasing reliance on the exclusivity of the feature-film format. Thompson's thorough research and meticulous attention to detail here brings to light a period of experimentation within the mainstream commercial cinema which is too often overlooked; her discussion of *Camille* (1921), *Salome* (1922), *The Old Swimmin' Hole* (1921), *The Yellow Girl* (1915), *The Blue Bird* (1918), and particularly *The Salvation Hunters* (1924) presents the experimental work of this period in an entirely new and refreshing perspective.

Brian Taves accomplishes much the same objective in "Robert Florey and the Hollywood Avant-Garde," examining such films as *The Life and Death of 9413—A Hollywood Extra* (1927) and *The Love of Zero* (1928), and the efforts of William Cameron Menzies (later famous as an art director and designer for numerous classic Hollywood features, notably *Gone With the Wind* [1939]), Slavko Vorkapich, Robert Florey, and Gregg Toland (who served as the cameraman on as *The Life and Death of 9413—A Hollywood Extra* at the age of 23). These pioneer avant-gardists created a memorable legacy with only a few experimental short films, and then decided to work within the Hollywood establishment on the production of more conventional narrative fare.

William Moritz's chapter, "Americans in Paris: Man Ray and Dudley Murphy," contains some of the more surprising revelations in the volume. Moritz traces the true genesis of such classic experimental French short films as Man Ray's *Le Retour à la raison* (*Return to Reason*) (1923) and *Emak Bakia* (1926), Henri Chomette's *Cinq minutes de cinéma pur* (1925), and *Ballet mécanique* (1924). The production circumstances of all these films is far more complex and conspiratorial than has previously been reported.

As recounted by Moritz, *Emak Bakia* and *Cinq minutes de cinéma pur* were each constructed in large part from sections of a film that Ray and Chomette had previously collaborated on, *A quoi rêvent les jeunes films?* (*What Do Young Films Dream About?*) (1924), which was immediately appropriated by its producer, Comte Etienne de Beaumont, as his own work. De Beaumont gave Ray and Chomette credit solely as camera operators, and kept the original negative of the film in his possession. Furious at this usurpation, the two film-makers stole the negative back from de Beaumont during a staged "portrait session" at de Beaumont's residence. As Man Ray took the preening count's photograph, Chomette successfully located and removed the reel of film negative. This task accomplished, the two film-makers proceeded to cut the film apart and incorporate their disparate sections of imagery in Ray's *Emak Bakia* (which also used new material) and Chomette's *Cinq minutes de cinéma pur*.

Even more scandalous is the history of *Ballet mécanique*. While Fernand Léger routinely receives credit for the film in most film history texts, he apparently seems to have had little to do with the making of the film, which, according to Moritz, was actually created by Dudley Murphy and Man Ray, with editorial (and some graphic) contributions by Léger and Ezra Pound(!). Ray took his name off the film of his own volition, suspecting, Moritz argues, that Léger wanted to claim sole credit; a decade after the film's first release, Murphy's name had also been expunged from the project. Moritz's discussion of *Ballet mécanique* offers compelling evidence that "cinema history" is always a slippery, multivalent affair.

Rounding out the second half of the volume, Patricia R. Zimmerman's essay "Startling Angles: Amateur Film and the Early Avant-Garde" examines the early stirrings of independent film practice in the United States in light of then-current "amateur" filmmaking, finding useful correlations between experimental 16mm cinema and the first usage of the cinematographic apparatus as an extension of the American domestic sphere into the external world of visual communication; Lisa Cartwright's essay on the films of James Sibley Watson, Jr., and Melville Webber sheds new light on the pioneering work of these relatively famous experimentalists; Chuck Kleinhans offers a perceptive and sympathetic overview on the writing and scholarly activities of Theodore Huff, whose name has often been marginalized from mainstream film studies; Scott MacDonald examines the films of Ralph Steiner, another leading and often canonized experimental cinema artist in careful and considered detail; and Charles Wolfe discusses the many links between early independent cinema and the socially conscious documentarists of the 1930s.

Jan-Christopher Horak offers a perceptive and

incisive analysis of Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*; William Oricchio deals persuasively with the early films of Jay Leyda, Herman G. Weinberg, and Irving Browning (with tangential discussions of the work of Lewis Jacobs, and other theoretician/film-makers of the period); Lauren Rabinovitz contributes a superb and tightly constructed essay on the films of Mary Ellen Bute, who is too often forgotten in the wake of Maya Deren and Marie Menken; and Tom Gunning offers the final essay in the volume, on the works of Douglass Crockwell, another often overlooked member of the American pioneer avant-garde. The volume concludes with a useful listing of films and film-makers from this period in cinema history, offering the reader a carefully selected and scrupulously accurate compendium of those artists who so urgently lay claim to our continued attention as audiences, scholars, and critics.

Thus, *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945* gathers in one location a series of invaluable documents, essays that combine both fact and opinion on this important period in American cinema history, thus providing an excellent text for a course in this area of film practice, as well as a highly entertaining book read simply as an examination of early experimental cinema practice. Lovingly detailed and even-handedly presented, this is an example of what cinema scholarship should represent at its finest: carefully detailed, unafraid of the canon, and illustrated with numerous rare stills and frame blowups. All in all, this volume signals the beginning of a new era in the discussion of the early American avant-garde. As the texts contained in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945* make manifestly clear, we have only begun to scratch the surface of this important and fascinating period in the history of the American cinema.

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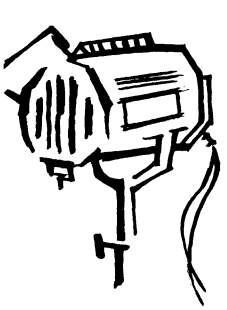

Nothing Happens

Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday

By Ivone Margulies. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996. $49.95 cloth; $16.95 paper.

It is an unfortunate truth that there are not now—nor have there ever been—many women making feature-length films. Given this fact, it is not surprising that there are even fewer women film-makers who make interesting, much less radically alternative feature films. Chantal Akerman is one such rara avis, and Ivone Margulies's *Nothing Happens*—the first book-length study of Akerman's work—is keenly welcome and long overdue. Margulies proposes three main lines of inquiry in her book: women and the everyday; time and duration; and the notion of type. This agenda only hints at the richness and depth of the author's project.

Nothing Happens commences with an erudite and often brilliant examination of the philosophical, historical, political, and social context of Akerman's formative work, beginning with her short, *Saute ma ville* (1968). At the core of Akerman's film-making is her emergence as an artist at the moment when phenomenology, existentialism, semiology, the Annales school, and feminism coalesce. The major catalysts for Akerman are the thrust toward description and observation in cinema that evolves from Husserl through Merleau-Ponty through Bazin (the author is particularly subtle in her articulation of the philosophical dimensions and problematics of Bazin's notions of realism); the fascination with the surface of things as characterized by the work of Barthes, Godard, Robbe-Grillet, Resnais; and the shift from neorealism and direct cinema to the hyperbolization in films such as Warhol's. Margolies views Akerman's films as an attack on the "essentialist humanism of neo-realism"; they shift from the generic everyman hero who characterized those films toward singular, particularized figures who remain—in subversive, complex ways—involved with drama and narrative. Neorealism remains a ground zero for Margulies as she charts the use of the long take in modern cinema—as a movement away from the representation of reality toward "a subtle weave of artifice and spontaneity, of theatricality and realistic detail."

Margulies's book is exciting both in the quality and range of her references. She makes appropriate connections between Akerman's films and minimal art, performance art, and minimalist and structuralist film, particularly in the ways they represent the

incisive analysis of Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*; William Oricchio deals persuasively with the early films of Jay Leyda, Herman G. Weinberg, and Irving Browning (with tangential discussions of the work of Lewis Jacobs, and other theoretician/film-makers of the period); Lauren Rabinovitz contributes a superb and tightly constructed essay on the films of Mary Ellen Bute, who is too often forgotten in the wake of Maya Deren and Marie Menken; and Tom Gunning offers the final essay in the volume, on the works of Douglass Crockwell, another often overlooked member of the American pioneer avant-garde. The volume concludes with a useful listing of films and film-makers from this period in cinema history, offering the reader a carefully selected and scrupulously accurate compendium of those artists who so urgently lay claim to our continued attention as audiences, scholars, and critics.

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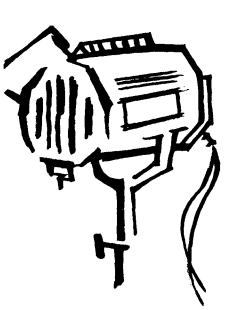

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Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday

By Ivone Margulies. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996. $49.95 cloth; $16.95 paper.

It is an unfortunate truth that there are not now—nor have there ever been—many women making feature-length films. Given this fact, it is not surprising that there are even fewer women film-makers who make interesting, much less radically alternative feature films. Chantal Akerman is one such rara avis, and Ivone Margulies's *Nothing Happens*—the first book-length study of Akerman's work—is keenly welcome and long overdue. Margulies proposes three main lines of inquiry in her book: women and the everyday; time and duration; and the notion of type. This agenda only hints at the richness and depth of the author's project.

Nothing Happens commences with an erudite and often brilliant examination of the philosophical, historical, political, and social context of Akerman's formative work, beginning with her short, *Saute ma ville* (1968). At the core of Akerman's film-making is her emergence as an artist at the moment when phenomenology, existentialism, semiology, the Annales school, and feminism coalesce. The major catalysts for Akerman are the thrust toward description and observation in cinema that evolves from Husserl through Merleau-Ponty through Bazin (the author is particularly subtle in her articulation of the philosophical dimensions and problematics of Bazin's notions of realism); the fascination with the surface of things as characterized by the work of Barthes, Godard, Robbe-Grillet, Resnais; and the shift from neorealism and direct cinema to the hyperbolization in films such as Warhol's. Margolies views Akerman's films as an attack on the "essentialist humanism of neo-realism"; they shift from the generic everyman hero who characterized those films toward singular, particularized figures who remain—in subversive, complex ways—involved with drama and narrative. Neorealism remains a ground zero for Margulies as she charts the use of the long take in modern cinema—as a movement away from the representation of reality toward "a subtle weave of artifice and spontaneity, of theatricality and realistic detail."

Margulies's book is exciting both in the quality and range of her references. She makes appropriate connections between Akerman's films and minimal art, performance art, and minimalist and structuralist film, particularly in the ways they represent the

human body. The author views Akerman's work as an intersection of the sensorial and the conceptual, the abstract and the concrete. She terms the Belgian film-maker's work "corporeal cinema," and makes interesting connections in this regard to Dreyer, Bresson, and Rohmer.

Nothing Happens, not surprisingly, centers on discussions of *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), which remains Akerman's key achievement. Margulies interrogates previous feminist interpretations of the film that locate Jeanne as a quintessential female victim of the patriarchy whose oppression leads to an act of violent rage. Margulies attacks this rendition on a variety of levels, adding multifaceted layers to the now somewhat stale "woman-as-victim" rhetoric. Rather than seeing Jeanne's act of murder as an act of will or volition—which would endow her character with free choice and provide a liberation of sorts—Margulies instead raises the issue of Jeanne's automatism.

The film figures the discrepancy between the two versions of "automaton" as a wound at the heart of the representation of intentionality: as a short circuit in the possibility of a deterministic (and essentialist) reading. Instead of leading to an ultimate cause (whether for the character's gestures or for Akerman's), the film is a liminal representation that insists on the problematics of causes.

Herein lies a fundamental concept that subtends *Nothing Happens*: Akerman is a problematizer of issues; her films offer no clear answers to debates that inform modernist cinema, whether about feminism, illusionism vs. anti-illusionism, or narrativity. Margulies's book insightfully investigates the designations that have emblematized previous writings on Akerman to reveal a more complex agenda at work, and to demonstrate the ways in which the film-maker presents a radical alternative within alternative cinema.

Margulies tenders an interesting comparison between Akerman and Yvonne Rainer to examine the ways in which each tackles the problems of the formation of identity in feminist cinema, and concomitant notions such as representativeness, commonality within diversity, and solidarity. Rainer, says Margulies, is always at great pains to avoid the "myth of the unified subject." She deliberately avoids distinct characters, a consolidated authorial presence, and strategies that would lead to a unified sense of narrative. Akerman, on the other hand, questions the notion of identity through a disjunctive representation of a central figure, wherein author, performer, and character are incorporated in "several conflicting registers." Akerman creates identities that are mobile and transient, rather than stable and well formed. Margulies criticizes Rainer for presenting a vision of female identity that fails to radically grapple with either personal or political material. Akerman's films present a "crisis of identity," thereby making her work the more transgressive and boldly figured. Margulies uses as her example *Je tu il elle* (1974), about which she writes:

> The images . . . don't cancel representation; they reveal scene and character starkly. But referentiality is imploded, for though reality is entirely apparent, even naked, it is represented as simultaneously faltering and excessive, discontinuous and repetitive, circular and nontotalizing. Overt display creates an aporia of evidence—we see all of the room, all of the character, all of the love-making—yet this "all," this totality, is denied, through the sparseness of the visual elements, the cleansing of anecdotal events and, most important, the resolute assertion of particularities.

Margulies sees Akerman as the *chercheur*, questioning not only the difference between realism and literalness, but promoting the notion that instability resides at the very core of subjectivity. There can be no representative "woman" if the very idea of the self is so radically undermined.

Margulies continues her rethinking of the traditional feminist handling of Akerman by formulating an interesting correspondence between *Jeanne Dielman* and Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1966). The obvious point of comparison between the two films is the housewife/prostitute dyad. Where Godard uses the figure to enact a commentary on contemporaneous semiological, historical, and political issues, he basically eradicates the idea of character. Akerman, on the other hand, uses the housewife/prostitute image—already overburdened with meanings by the 70s—to overturn "an essentialist view of woman." The film-maker does this, interestingly, by casting a famous actor—Delphine Seyrig, a mythical "art cinema" presence—in the role of an anonymous housewife. Seyrig's resonance expands the meanings of the role, making her neither representative nor merely an individual. Akerman is "making strange" through the choice of her actor, invalidating the notion of representativeness. She uses what had by then become a feminist cliché only to subvert it, and to redefine the representation of "the feminine."

The author writes well on the ways in which Akerman challenges conventional narrative practices, particularly in her collapse of notions of address.

Margulies also cites Akerman's emphasis on the rhythmical and performative in her texts, rather than on meaning of the language itself. She gives informative examples of the film-makers orchestration of silence and monologue, and of her scoring of "amplified diegetic sound," e.g., spoons hitting plates in *Jeanne Dielman*. The use of text again places Akerman in a position of interstitiality—her long monologue-like dialogues seem to militate against a character's interiority, yet because the speeches are so long, they beg to be investigated for meaning.

Nothing Happens is replete with incisive, original, and well-documented arguments on the works from the beginning of Akerman's career to *Les rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978). However, the cursory though intelligent treatment of some of her later films does nothing to elevate the quality of the book. There is also a sometimes unbearable level of pretentiousness in Margulies's prose (she writes, for instance, about "the abstractive pull of Akerman's fragmented seriality," or elsewhere: "Despite such simulacral effects, however, Akerman's hyperrealism is not wasted on the myths of representational origins, nor are the references it mobilizes neutralized in a game of endless relativity"). As much as one admires Margulies's densely argued text, at times her use of language does nothing to facilitate the reader's understanding of her contentions.

Finally, Margulies also displays what can only be called a rather supercilious attitude toward anything that is not "alternative cinema." She writes of "the inarticulate babblings of . . . method [acting]," and in a section devoted to Akerman's indebtedness to Bresson, proclaims: "Flat, economical, and exact, the performance of Bresson's models—his nonprofessional actors—subverts naturalism through the automatism *proper to cinema*" (emphasis mine). Margulies's unnecessary tone of exclusivity suggests an unpleasant arrogance that detracts from an otherwise dazzling reading of the work of one of our most important film-makers.

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Queen of the B's

Ida Lupino Behind the Camera

Edited by Annette Kuhn. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995. $19.95, paper; Greenwood Press, $59.95 cloth.

As feminist film studies matures and as increasing attention in film and television studies is paid to industry history, numerous feminist scholars are turning to the reconstruction and evaluation of the role of women in film history, a role all but totally obscured until recently. And although even standard histories of the cinema have been unable to ignore Ida Lupino—the most visible woman directing in film and television in the male-dominated Hollywood of the late 1940s and the 1950s—most scholars have seen her primarily as an actress, and no full-scale study of her work as a writer, producer, and director has appeared until now. *Queen of the B's: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera* aims to fill this void, and does an admirable job of examining her work in film, if not in television.

The historical reclamation of women film-makers is complicated by the simultaneous fascination with and disavowal of auteur studies. In her introduction to this volume, Annette Kuhn resists the arguments that Ida Lupino should be reconsidered as a feminist; that a feminist canon should be developed, with Lupino's formidable body of work in film and in television included; and that Lupino should be reconstructed as a Great Artist. Rather, Kuhn argues that Lupino's work should be assessed as a part of the motion-picture mainstream. Paradoxically, Kuhn includes in this volume a number of articles that seek to do precisely what she argues against. Some authors call for a feminist canon, some reconsider Lupino as a feminist, and others show her to be an auteur with a distinctive voice. Nowhere, however, is "feminist" defined, and nowhere is there a consideration of what that term might have meant in the period during which Lupino worked as a film-maker. Still, the volume manages to be a substantial contribution to both the history of women in film-making and the history of Hollywood.

The anthology includes Kuhn's brief historical overview of Lupino's life and career, chapters by well-known and talented film scholars on each of the seven films that Lupino directed between 1949 and 1966 (all but the last produced by a production company in which she was a controlling partner), a chapter on Lupino's work as a television director, a filmography, a tele-ography, a listing of archives and other research

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resources, and a bibliography of scholarly and popular publications on Lupino. Each of the chapters on her films employs a different approach, illustrating not only Lupino's work but the diversity within contemporary feminist film studies.

In her chapter on *Not Wanted* (1949), the first film directed by Lupino, Diane Waldman tackles head-on a basic problem for feminist film studies: "reconciling the sometimes contradictory projects of reclaiming women's contributions to the cinema with critical analysis and evaluation of the representations they helped to create." This is an especially daunting task with a director like Lupino, whose rhetoric occasionally took on what, in terms of 1990s feminism, seems to be an antifeminist tone. Waldman derives her solution to this problem not solely through textual analysis but also by placing *Not Wanted*—a film about nonmarital sex and unwanted pregnancy—within its historical and production context, emphasizing Lupino's role as a negotiator in her ultimately successful attempt to gain script approval from the Production Code Administration. Lupino sacrificed "some of the acute articulations of gender and class in the original script" in order to get it approved, but Waldman argues that—as co-writer and director—Lupino was able to move the script in a more female-centered direction.

Ronnie Scheib devotes the first third of her chapter—ostensibly on Lupino's second film, *Never Fear* (1950)—to describing Lupino's contributions to the social-problem film, specifically the recurring thematics in her films, her cinematic style, and the overall narrative pattern characteristic of her work. Scheib's chapter lays the groundwork for placing Lupino's directorial work in both film and television, and her earlier writing on Lupino is referred to in later chapters by Pam Cook, Mandy Merck, Lauren Rabinovitz, and Ellen Seiter. Scheib's analysis also shows patterns in Lupino's films, demonstrating the rationale for seeing her as an auteur and a feminist. Lupino's films (and some of her television products) depicted passivity—not necessarily as a feminine trait but as a "process of consciousness." Her protagonists (male and female) watch their own dysfunctionality and disintegration, from a distance, and Lupino's signature cinematic style—"a balance between the dynamic stylistic impetus of drama and the open-ended 'documentary' autonomy of real location space"—reinforced the narrative pattern characteristic of her films: "a brief opening positing a continuing 'normal' life; a sudden traumatic interruption of that flow; an overwhelming sense of alienation and disorientation; a brief respite at some sheltered communal refuge; a reversal of trauma by the active assumption of what was initially passive-experienced; and a tentative start of a new life."

Scheib's analysis of *Never Fear*, a film about a female dancer struck with polio and the ups and downs of her relationship with her male partner, calls attention to Lupino's dramatic experimentation with distorting sound and image, mismatching points of view, and creating deliberately disjunctive editing. In *Never Fear*, Lupino resists the Hollywood convention that centers the star, leading Scheib to argue that this is what makes her not only a modernist director but a feminist one. Finally, Scheib argues that Lupino's examination of the tension of dependence and independence makes *Never Fear* her most autobiographical film.

In her article on *Outrage* (1950), Pam Cook points out that because Lupino's films were independently produced, contained adventurous subject matter, and broke with Hollywood aesthetic conventions, they can be seen as paving the way for the independent feminist film-makers of the 1970s even though some feminist critics (Molly Haskell, Patricia White) have characterized the films as conventional and sexist. Cook's chapter initially appears to plunge into this debate, one Kuhn tries to sideline in her introduction: Was Lupino a feminist or was she not? Cook observes that the film's narrative—focused on a traumatized rape victim—does not look promising for an argument that Lupino was a feminist. But by playing distinctly different kinds of feminist readings of the film against each other, she succeeds in complicating "feminism" and in showing how different faces of feminism may surface in a popular film. Finally, Cook astutely observes that the attempt to "recover the work of women in the past in the interest of present-day feminism"—indeed, the very attempt to find feminism in popular texts, which by their nature reproduce popularized versions of feminism rather than "authentic" feminism—is doomed to frustration.

Mandy Merck's analysis of the maternal melodrama *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951), the fourth film directed by Lupino, places the work at the intersection of social and industrial discourses—postwar discourses that severely limited the scope of roles "appropriate" for middle-class women to wife and mother, and discourses about sports and their attendant economics. Merck sketches the history of tennis from its British beginnings in 1873 through the beginning of professional tennis in the 1920s to the 1940s, and points out that the film makes an explicit connection between athleticism and femininity, showing that both involve work (noting the "performative aspect of femininity"). The most interesting aspect of Merck's analysis, in fact, is the way in which she

explicates these discursive intersections, moving on to place them in yet other intersections. She shows how the film deploys the intersection of femininity, competitive sports, and work to condemn the commercialization of sports and, more generally, commodity culture, through the convergence of economics and erotica, pointing out the "uncertain" division of the female performer and the prostitute.

Early in her chapter on *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953) Lauren Rabinovitz notes that the film puzzled critics of the 1970s who argued that Lupino was an auteur and a feminist director, because its main characters are all male and it does not examine typically female situations. Those critics, she concludes, were naïve; the answer "is quite simple. While the film does not actively critique gender roles, it does unsettle and foreground the alienation of rigidly defined gender roles." The bulk of the chapter focuses on the way the film represents postwar constructions of masculinity. Each of the film's three major characters—two suburban husbands on a fishing trip and the hitchhiking serial killer they pick up—presents a different masculinity, and the script (coauthored by Lupino and Collier Young), the mise-en-scène, and the characterizations work to place them hierarchically as more and less "appropriate." Rabinovitz notes that the rigid gender characterizations of the 1950s invite rebellion and that each of the three main characters rebels in his own way. Rabinovitz's analysis places Lupino as distinctly feminist.

In her chapter on *The Bigamist* (1953), Ellen Seiter analyzes the film's mixture of the film noir and the domestic melodrama—a combination that "produces a particularly unsettling result: an exceptionally pessimistic view of marriage and domestic life." The film's refusal "to assign moral culpability" and its lack of narrative closure make it a highly unusual Hollywood product, especially in the 1950s, and show Lupino to be a particularly adventurous director—an auteur.

After 1953, Lupino's directing work was all in television until 1966, when she directed her last film, *The Trouble with Angels*, for William Frye Productions and Columbia Pictures. Arguing that a "queer" approach to the film more adequately explains it than a "straight" approach, Mary Beth Haralovich, Janet Jakobsen, and Susan White analyze the female gazes of the two major characters, characters who represent distinctly different generations in the rapidly evolving Roman Catholicism of the 1960s (after Vatican II). The film, they argue, is about social change, about woman-woman identification, and about the attractions of a community of women—attractions that are both homosocial and homosexual. Analyzing a series of looks between and by women, they show how one of the major characters comes to accept her vocation as a nun, resolving for herself "conflicts of young womanhood in the arenas of work, family, sexuality, and spirituality." As a number of the volume's authors do, these three also show Lupino to be a distinctly, if implicitly, feminist director.

In the volume's final chapter and the only one on Lupino's work as a television director during the 1950s and 1960s, Mary Celeste Kearney and James M. Moran follow the argument that the primary authorial role in television is that of the producer and that the director has no influence on the television text. They pay no attention to the actual television programs Lupino directed, other than to mention the genres in which she most commonly worked (Westerns, crime dramas, mysteries). This is a gap in scholarship on Lupino that still needs to be filled. Instead, Kearney and Moran focus on the contradictory discourses about Lupino as a television director generated by journalists and by Lupino herself, discourses that simultaneously gendered Lupino as masculine while calling attention to her language and physical appearance as highly feminine. The authors repeatedly express their frustration that Lupino was not a 1990s feminist because she characterized herself in a manner that would keep her from seeming a freak in this period just before the birth of the most recent women's movement (the only one they acknowledge). They do acknowledge that she supported herself and her husband quite well through her directing, but they seem oblivious to the fact that her self-promotion as highly feminine ensured her frequent employment both as an actress and as a director—an impressive task during this period, a task accomplished, as this volume proves, by a modernist, feminist director.

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The Reality of Illusion

An Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film Theory

By Joseph D. Anderson. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. $29.95.

Joseph Anderson's *The Reality of Illusion* combines an "ecological" and a cognitive approach to film theory in its account of the accessibility, realism, and psychological power of motion pictures. Anderson gives interesting and often compelling accounts of the psychology of numerous elements of film viewing, from flicker and motion perception to character identification to the importance of play in our engagement with film narrative—all in all, a substantial contribution to the emerging cognitive approach to film theory. Although some will disagree with specific points or emphases, the book's clarity, brevity (200 pages), and insight make it a good and suggestive introduction to the kind of theory it represents.

Anderson begins by placing his work within the context of film theory, coming down firmly on the side of science and evolutionary naturalism rather than the postmodern skepticism that is currently popular. He opposes both the "bizarre program" of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Althusserian semiotics (which was most influential in the 70s and 80s), and what he views as cynical and mannerist postmodern theory. He expresses affinity for the work of David Bordwell and Noël Carroll and with cognitivism. The cognitive approach, however, is not a uniform school or theory. Anderson's particular brand of cognitivism embraces epistemological and perceptual realism, as opposed to Bordwell's constructivism, and Anderson appeals to psychological research rather than the logical arguments that underpin Carroll's work. Moreover, Anderson's implication that culture has little to do with the human capacity for viewing films is an emphasis with which some cognitivists would disagree.

Anderson argues that science, while a human activity and thus imperfect, nonetheless provides the best methodology for investigating the issues of film theory and psychology. Anderson's theory is "ecological" after the work of famed perceptual psychologist J. J. Gibson. Gibson claimed that "all human capacities for perceiving our world are rooted in our unique biological evolution as a species" (17). The viewer's psychological capacities evolved over the course of millions of years, and it is these ancient capacities to which the film-maker must appeal, and to which films and film techniques often conform. Hollywood film-makers, through years of trial and error, discovered "how to make their products accessible to individuals across economic and class boundaries and across national and cultural boundaries as well" (11). When we consider human capacities within the context of human evolution, "we quickly realize that our capacities exist within boundaries, and seldom if ever can those boundaries be overridden by [a] transitory cultural fad" (15).

Anderson downplays the influence of culture in our interaction with films, but he does not deny it. He defines a film as a surrogate environment that engages us in some of the ways the natural environment does, by offering what he calls, after Gibson, "affordances." An affordance is a relationship or potential relationship with our environment. Elements of the natural world have significance for us in relation to our needs and desires; our interaction with our environment is a matter of seeking out those elements that are relevant to our goals. When confronted with a film or with a situation in the actual world, we respond through an active process of "schema and exploration." This response, however, differs in accordance with degrees of learning and experience. Two persons looking at a chessboard may see radically different affordances if, for example, one is a seasoned player and the other is unfamiliar with the game. Thus perception is a matter of selection and attention, and an affordance, as a relationship between us and our environment, "can be enhanced or changed by learning" (42).

Anderson would say, I believe, that while our perceptual and cognitive capacities are universally human, culture may influence the way we use these capacities. Perhaps in response to the relativist theory that has dominated film studies, however, Anderson seems interested not in explaining the relationship between biology and culture, but in demonstrating how universal biological capacities determine how films are viewed and made.

After establishing his theoretical approach, Anderson applies it to various elements of film, with chapters on visual elements (flicker and motion perception, depth, color), sound and image, continuity editing, diegesis, character, and narrative. In each case, Anderson shows how human biological capacities and adaptive strategies are used in viewing films. For example, he argues that neither persistence of vision nor "Wertheimer's *phi* movement" adequately explain the illusion of movement in film; instead he appeals to "flicker fusion," the fact that our visual system simply fails to distinguish "small frame to frame changes in a movie" from "continuous changes that occur in real motion in nature, resulting in the former being processed by the networks of the visual system as real motion" (61). He goes on to show that in

perceiving illusory depth on the film screen, we make use of strategies also used in real-world perception, such as motion parallax, texture gradients, and perspective (which he argues "may not be merely a cultural convention, [but] . . . a built-in feature of the way we see" [72]). Continuity editing, likewise, follows rules of thumb grounded in "rules" used in the human visual system—for example, continuity of existence, rigidity, occlusion, and spatial orientation. "Pictorial continuity," he writes, "is not bound by the culture that developed it. It is not necessarily an expression of that culture's ideology. Apart from any specific content, it can be appropriated by anyone for any purpose" (110).

Of greatest interest to me are the later chapters, in which Anderson moves beyond perception and cognition to grapple with the lure and power of movies. Of necessity, Anderson's explanations in these later chapters become more speculative. Our enjoyment of visual fictions stems from our capacity for play, a universal human activity that has evolutionary value in providing cognitive (and, I would add, emotional) practice. As Anderson writes, the "mode of 'Let's pretend' allows individuals in a species to try out behavior without the consequences of the real situation" (114). Our innate ability to "frame" different experiences allows us to separate the fictional experience from reality.

Anderson's chapter on film character is quite suggestive. There he describes research on the relationship between facial expression and emotion, and the means by which we attribute character to a person on the screen. Most important, Anderson unpacks the notoriously ambiguous concept of identification into three component parts: perspective-taking, caring, and role identification. (This typology is interesting in comparison with Murray Smith's description of character engagement as involving recognition, perceptual and epistemic alignment, and allegiance.) As for narrative, Anderson suggests that the impulse to narrate may be more basic than language itself, and that "it is the possibility of narrating *experience* that gives language its power" (146). He argues that storytelling in movies is powerful because it re-presents experience by creating a kind of surrogate reality. Like other forms of play, viewing fictional narratives has transformative and educational potential.

This suggestive book raises as many questions as it answers, but it also establishes an attractive paradigm for further research. My one reservation has to do with the minute role Anderson assigns to cultural and gender influences in film psychology. It is clear that culture and gender play a role in our responses to films, especially when one moves beyond simple perception to cognition and emotion. Anderson's theory is good as a corrective to those who presume that biology plays no part whatsoever, or that our basic responses to films are wholly determined by gender. Given the current fascination with culture and gender difference, however, a discussion of how to distinguish, in principle, universal biological capacities from cultural and gender differences would have been helpful.

Since Anderson downplays "difference," some readers are sure to find political "dangers" here. In my opinion, such posturing is unhelpful. Anderson's belief in universal human capacities implies no specific ideological project. There may be a political danger in "naturalizing" that which is in fact the product of culture. As the Marxists tell us, this can work against the possibility of change. But there is also a danger in assuming a magical human freedom, wholly independent of our species' adaptive history and the constraints of the natural world. Moreover, in the venerable humanist tradition, Anderson emphasizes those characteristics we share. We should remember that positing human differences, while useful in celebrating diversity, is elsewhere used to justify prejudice, ethnic cleansing, the caste system, and patriarchy. Political posturing aside, the salient question is whether Anderson is correct about the importance of universal human capacities in viewing films. He makes a compelling case. The reader should examine the book and decide for herself.

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Seeing Through the Eighties

Television and Reaganism

By Jane Feuer. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995. $45.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

The paperback edition of Jane Feuer's new book displays a canted-angle cover photo taken from the September 2, 1985, cover of *New York Magazine*. Seated like a reigning queen before the recognizable stars of "Dynasty" is series creator Esther Shapiro. Although the leftward canted angle intends to assure

perceiving illusory depth on the film screen, we make use of strategies also used in real-world perception, such as motion parallax, texture gradients, and perspective (which he argues "may not be merely a cultural convention, [but] . . . a built-in feature of the way we see" [72]). Continuity editing, likewise, follows rules of thumb grounded in "rules" used in the human visual system—for example, continuity of existence, rigidity, occlusion, and spatial orientation. "Pictorial continuity," he writes, "is not bound by the culture that developed it. It is not necessarily an expression of that culture's ideology. Apart from any specific content, it can be appropriated by anyone for any purpose" (110).

Of greatest interest to me are the later chapters, in which Anderson moves beyond perception and cognition to grapple with the lure and power of movies. Of necessity, Anderson's explanations in these later chapters become more speculative. Our enjoyment of visual fictions stems from our capacity for play, a universal human activity that has evolutionary value in providing cognitive (and, I would add, emotional) practice. As Anderson writes, the "mode of 'Let's pretend' allows individuals in a species to try out behavior without the consequences of the real situation" (114). Our innate ability to "frame" different experiences allows us to separate the fictional experience from reality.

Anderson's chapter on film character is quite suggestive. There he describes research on the relationship between facial expression and emotion, and the means by which we attribute character to a person on the screen. Most important, Anderson unpacks the notoriously ambiguous concept of identification into three component parts: perspective-taking, caring, and role identification. (This typology is interesting in comparison with Murray Smith's description of character engagement as involving recognition, perceptual and epistemic alignment, and allegiance.) As for narrative, Anderson suggests that the impulse to narrate may be more basic than language itself, and that "it is the possibility of narrating *experience* that gives language its power" (146). He argues that storytelling in movies is powerful because it re-presents experience by creating a kind of surrogate reality. Like other forms of play, viewing fictional narratives has transformative and educational potential.

This suggestive book raises as many questions as it answers, but it also establishes an attractive paradigm for further research. My one reservation has to do with the minute role Anderson assigns to cultural and gender influences in film psychology. It is clear that culture and gender play a role in our responses to films, especially when one moves beyond simple perception to cognition and emotion. Anderson's theory is good as a corrective to those who presume that biology plays no part whatsoever, or that our basic responses to films are wholly determined by gender. Given the current fascination with culture and gender difference, however, a discussion of how to distinguish, in principle, universal biological capacities from cultural and gender differences would have been helpful.

Since Anderson downplays "difference," some readers are sure to find political "dangers" here. In my opinion, such posturing is unhelpful. Anderson's belief in universal human capacities implies no specific ideological project. There may be a political danger in "naturalizing" that which is in fact the product of culture. As the Marxists tell us, this can work against the possibility of change. But there is also a danger in assuming a magical human freedom, wholly independent of our species' adaptive history and the constraints of the natural world. Moreover, in the venerable humanist tradition, Anderson emphasizes those characteristics we share. We should remember that positing human differences, while useful in celebrating diversity, is elsewhere used to justify prejudice, ethnic cleansing, the caste system, and patriarchy. Political posturing aside, the salient question is whether Anderson is correct about the importance of universal human capacities in viewing films. He makes a compelling case. The reader should examine the book and decide for herself.

CARL PLANTINGA

■ Carl Plantinga teaches film at Hollins College. His book, *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*, has just been published by Cambridge University Press.

Seeing Through the Eighties

Television and Reaganism

By Jane Feuer. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995. $45.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

The paperback edition of Jane Feuer's new book displays a canted-angle cover photo taken from the September 2, 1985, cover of *New York Magazine*. Seated like a reigning queen before the recognizable stars of "Dynasty" is series creator Esther Shapiro. Although the leftward canted angle intends to assure

readers of the book's radical credentials, it also reveals the instability of the entire project. The figures smile at the reader as if hoping to produce a critical spectator, but one also complicit with certain textual productions of the Reagan era. Despite Feuer's critical premises, she suggests that "a better understanding of television could have led to a better understanding of Reaganism by the Left" and that 80s couch potatoes "watching TV could claim to have been the true radicals of the decade" (16). This claim will surprise the era's politically active opponents who demonstrated against anti-abortion legislation and another Vietnam in South America. Feuer's insulting statement acutely demonstrates the value of Andrew Britton's neglected but relevant indictment of certain proponents of postmodernism as "the bourgeois intelligentsia in the age of Reagan" (*cineACTION* 1988). It is an indictment applicable to *Seeing Through the Eighties,* a book whose postmodernist ideology represents an irrelevant, politically impotent tool, supposedly critical, but actually complicit with the dominant forces of televisual production.

Feuer, of course, has laudable aims. She aims to illustrate the relationship between Reaganism and certain contemporary television productions against the background of new technologies in a postmodern era characterized by VCRs, remote controls, and cable television. Critiquing John Fiske's concept of subordinate resisting readers, noting the rightward direction of such readings, and contesting Baudrillard's definition of spectacularly inclined "silent majorities," Feuer argues for the presence of a postmodernism dissolving boundaries between commodity and art, complicity and critique. This occurs within a volatile populist ideology rapidly swinging "to the right and left of center within a short time span" (11).

Feuer's first chapter deals with the problematic form of the 1980s made-for-television trauma drama: neoconservative nightmare or radical critique. She sees these dramas as different from their 60s and 70s predecessors in being "peculiarly symptomatic of the popular frustrations that brought Reagan to office and fueled the New Right engine of the 1980s" (19). Any text contains progressive as well as regressive features, but in examining works such as *Friendly Fire, An Early Frost, The Burning Bed, Toughlove,* and *M.A.D.D.*, Feuer sees the presence of "an anti-elitist desire in favor of a New Right agenda for victim's rights that will permeate the made-for-TV movie for the rest of the decade" (25). Feuer's arguments are intriguing but highly debatable, demanding more detailed interrogation of the material. She chooses a limited selection of texts, emphasizing those she feels support her thesis, ignoring others, and denying any contradictory meanings. She finally compiles her dramatic texts in a framework resembling Will Wright's abstracted selection in his structuralist *Six Guns and Society*. Any textual complexity tends to be rejected by such an arbitrary approach. For example, Feuer cursorily regards *To Heal a Nation* (1988) as a conservative work detailing "a charismatic and fanatical individual's fight to build the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial" (39). However, she ignores features in the teleplay by Lionel Chetwynd (director of the revisionist *The Hanoi Hilton*) that critique conservatives (such as Ross Perot) who opposed Maya Lin's design. *To Heal a Nation* features contradictory struggles that are neither exclusively right or left. The same may be true of the other texts Feuer examines. More evidence is needed to support the sweeping nature of her conclusions.

Feuer's next two chapters deal with the yuppie spectator and yuppie envy and guilt. She points out that "the unselfconscious yuppie was truly a media myth created by yuppie journalists" (51), but it was a potent phantom image in the Reagan era. But whether postmodern culture is "really a generational culture of the baby boom" (47) remains debatable. Detailed comprehensive statistical analysis and audience demographics are needed for this premise, neither of which Feuer provides in her postmodernist televisual *flâneur* approach. However, she points out that "during the Reagan years the major networks were not so much interested in 'pure' yuppie demographics as they were in constructing yuppie spectators for advertising "(58). She notes certain contradictory features of guilt and envy in productions such as "L.A. Law" and "thirtysomething" (one of her favorite texts). But nothing that could be called novel or even distinguishable from traditional close textual readings results from this type of analysis. Television does contain modernist/postmodernist/deconstructive instances where boundaries blur in a self-reflexive manner. But this is not confined to 80s works such as "Miami Vice," "Moonlighting," and "Max Headroom," as examples from other countries such as Anthony Newley's *The Strange World of Gurney Slade* (1960) and "The Prisoner" series (1966-67) show. Feuer's claims for recognizing different types of television achievements are important, but she needs to refer to other evidence to support her conclusions and not rely upon the unsupportable argument of historical uniqueness.

Feuer reserves her concluding chapter for "Dynasty," which she sees as a "complex phenomenon that has aspects of both commodification from above and subcultural activation from below" (191). However, by seeing the series in terms of a postmodernist ideological concept in which "the subcultural

activations of 'Dynasty' can be understood in all of their multivalence and ambivalence" (131), she targets camp-inclined gay men and heterosexual women as her key audience. Although the importance of such interpretative communities cannot be denied, one wonders about other neglected audiences, such as minorities and working-class people? They appear absent from Feuer's concerns, paralleling the 1989 purpose of Lifetime cable president James Fennimore, who "deleted the old, poor, and underemployed from the viewing mix" (54). The 80s also saw the beginning of shows such as "Murder She Wrote," "The Golden Girls," "Tour of Duty," and many others not included in Feuer's survey. Concentrating on "thirtysomething" and "Dynasty" does not make Feuer's work representative of the entire field of 80s television and Reaganism. More detailed treatment is needed similar to Andrew Britton's Reaganite Entertainment exploration in *Movie 32/33*. The notion that Alexis Carrington represents a vehicle allowing "for the outlet of the same hostility that was directed at Nancy Reagan" (139) is questionable, for it not only involves a direct reflection hypothesis now debatable among television critics, but also calls for more detailed reader-reception research than is found here. Feuer's ideal audience is the camp-inclined feminist-gay upper-middle-class circuit who relish reading "Dynasty" oppositionally as a political act and think of themselves as radicals. Whether this adequately represents a complex audience identification is another question. It clearly begs Meaghan Morris's salutary criticism of the banality of certain approaches towards cultural (and postmodernist) studies, a key text (not surprisingly) absent from this book.

Seeing Through the Eighties is a selective examination of a televisual decade not just confined to "Dynasty," "thirtysomething," "Miami Vice," and "Dallas." Television movies cited, such as *The Rape of Richard Beck* (1985), may also be interpreted as the deserved humiliation and rebirth of a repugnant Reaganite male chauvinist rather than a right-wing populist indictment of bureaucracy. Feuer never bothers to consider alternative readings that contradict her thesis. Although she does touch on certain series that began after the heyday of Reaganism, she ignores other works that also appeared toward the end of that hegemonic era. How does "Roseanne" and its depiction of a working-class family relate to her arguments? Works such as *Lonesome Dove* and "Magnum" deserve some consideration in any treatment concentrating on Reaganism and the 80s. Both "Magnum" and "Matt Houston" reveal a less contradictory aspect of Reaganism than"Dynasty" and "Dallas." The former two shows contain single episodes devoted to Vietnam revisionism (one of the key ideological movements within the era) which Feuer cursorily treats. Writers such as Douglas Kellner and various articles in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* provide better treatments of this complex decade. Flawed by its selective approach and problematic obsolete theoretical premises, *Seeing Through the Eighties* reveals the growing need for a televisual post-theory approach similar to alternative paradigms currently promoted in cinema studies today.

TONY WILLIAMS

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Book Notes

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The book's second half concentrates on several often-filmed performers: Ellington, Armstrong, Nat Cole, and Hoagy Carmichael. Perhaps for reasons of length, perhaps because Oedipus kept off camera, several Ellington shorts are passed over in an otherwise complete filmography. A Harman-Ising "swing" cartoon is cited for its Armstrong parody, but the animators' entire *Bosco* series would have opened a

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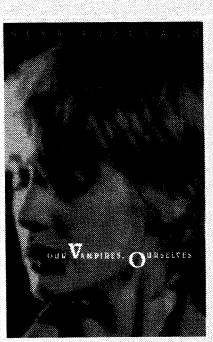
Our Vampires, Ourselves



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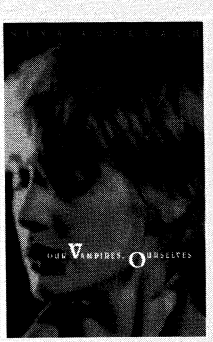

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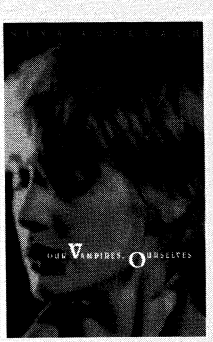

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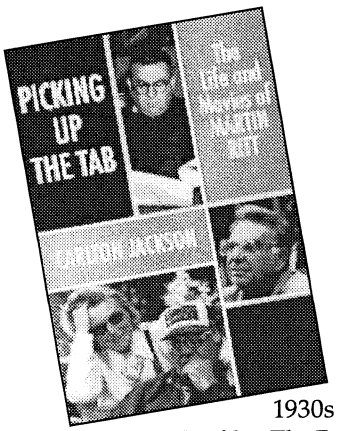

Picking Up the Tab

The Life and Movies of Martin Ritt

Carlton Jackson

At the memorial held after Martin Ritt's death in 1990, he was hailed as this country's greatest maker of social films. From *No Down Payment* , early in his career to *Stanley & Iris,* his last production, he delineated the nuances of American society. In between were other social statements such as *Hud, Sounder, The Spy Who Came In From the Cold, Norma Rae,* and *The Great White Hope.*

He was a leftist who embraced various radical movements of the 1930s and, largely because of this involvement, was blacklisted from television in the early 1950s. His film *The Front,* about the blacklisting, was his most autobiographical.

Some referred to his films as "think movies," and perhaps this is why he never won an Oscar for best directing. But he gave moviegoers all over the world an opportunity to see what America was really like—from the viewpoint both of the wealthy and of the poor.

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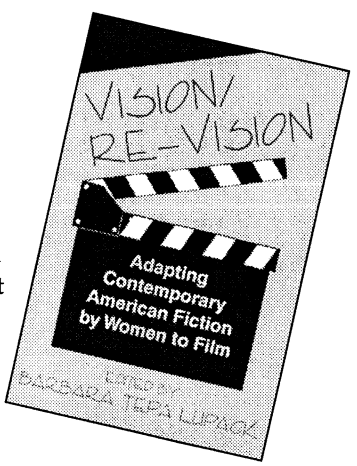
Popular Press on Film

Vision/Re-Vision

Adapting Contemporary American Fiction by Women to Film

Barbara Tepa Lupack, editor



Historically Hollywood has turned for its story ideas to literature, and fiction by women has provided some of the most interesting as well as some of the best sources. From the novels of classic favorites like Louisa May Alcott and Edith Wharton to the engaging, often quirky, tales of Francine Prose and Terry McMillan, fiction by American women has both afforded insights into American society and character and given producers and directors a wealth of filmable material.

The essays in *Vision/Re-Vision* analyze in detail ten popular and important films adapted from contemporary American fiction by women, addressing the ways in which the writers' latent or overt feminist messages are reinterpreted by the filmmakers who bring them to the screen, demonstrating that there is much to praise as well as much to fault in the adaptations and that the process of adaptation itself is instructive rather than destructive since it enriches understanding about both media.

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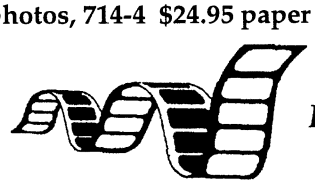

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